DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 420 796 CE 076 787

AUTHOR	Dwyer, Peter; Harwood, Aramiha; Tyler, Debra
TITLE	Life-Patterns, Choices, Careers: 1991-1998. Research Report 17.
INSTITUTION	Melbourne Univ., Parkville (Australia). Youth Research Centre.
ISBN	ISBN-0-7340-1392-2
PUB DATE	1998-06-00
NOTE	62p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Youth Research Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Melbourne, Parkville 3052, Victoria, Australia ($10 Australian).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Career Choice; Classification; *Educational Attitudes; Educational Research; *Employment Patterns; Foreign Countries; Graduate Surveys; Job Satisfaction; *Life Satisfaction; Occupational Aspiration; Postsecondary Education; Student Attitudes; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	Australia (Victoria)

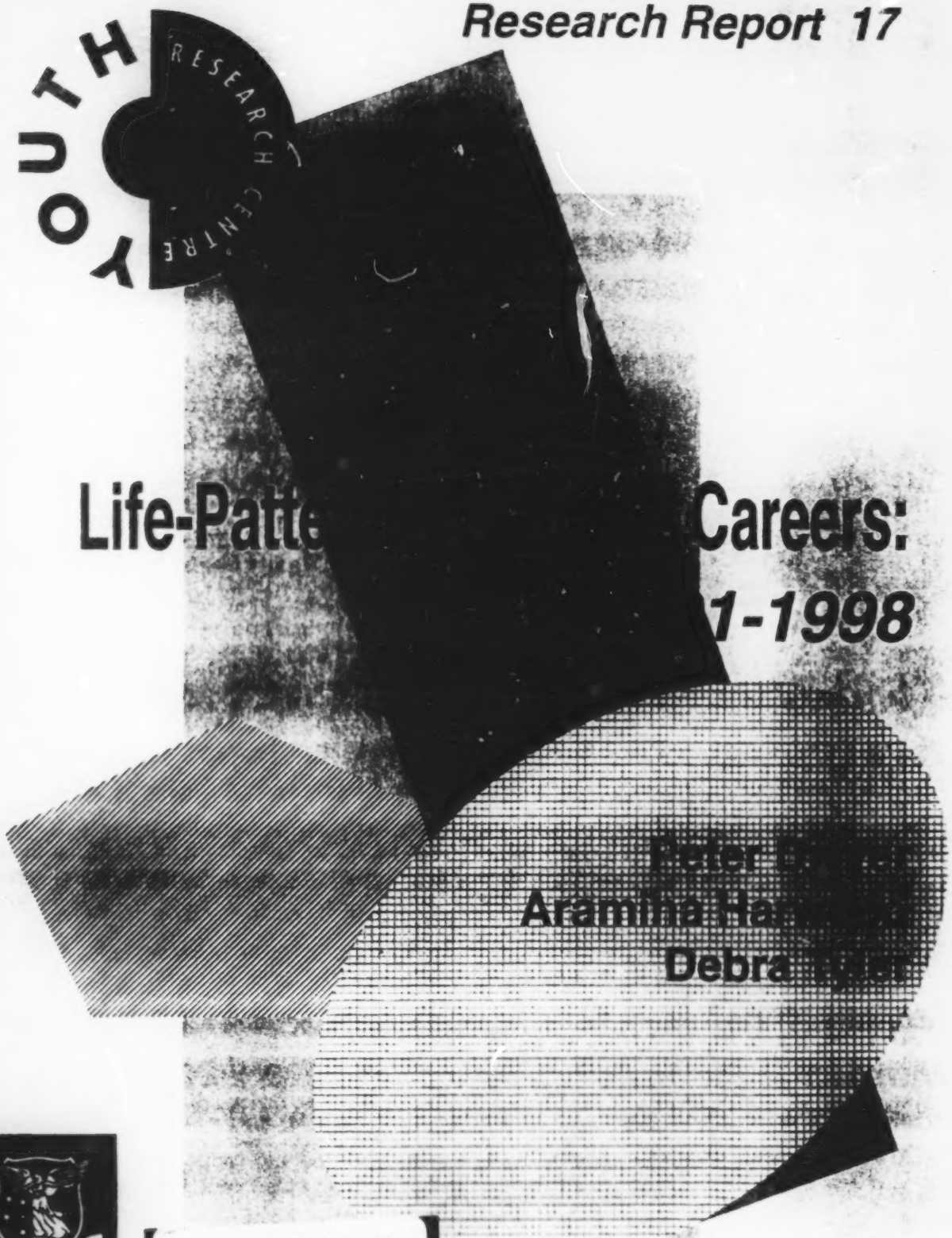
ABSTRACT

A follow-up study of participants in the "Life Patterns of the Post-1970 Generation" project (1,334 of 29,155 initial participants) focused on backgrounds, living situations, work and study involvement, and life experience and future expectations. Data indicated that 49 percent had attained a career job within 3 years of graduating. The majority seemed satisfied about their progress in achieving their main priority in life; about 75 percent were expecting things to improve in the near future; and 23 percent were running into difficulties. Of the 59 percent in full-time jobs, 43 percent had career prospects related to their field of study. The study was designed around two typologies of transition: vocational integration and life patterns. Participants were analyzed using vocational integration: 49 percent were vocationally integrated, 34 were integrating, and 17 were inactive. The following distribution of respondents into the five categories of the life patterns typology (VOCAM) emerged: 27 percent with a Vocational focus, 13 with an Occupational focus, 10 with a Contextual focus, 7 with Altered patterns, and 43 with Mixed patterns. Analysis of the problem of choice revealed the complexity of young people's experience, different levels of awareness of structural factors, and need to allow for a longer time frame for outcomes. Many respondents were acutely aware of factors that inhibit them from succeeding; many tended to blame themselves. (Appendixes include the life-patterns typology, identification of the VOCAM typology groupings, and 34 references.) (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED42-796

Research Report 17



Life-Patte Careers: 1-1998

Peter
Aramina Ha
Debra

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Youth Research Centre

June 1998

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Life-Patterns, Choices, Careers: 1991-1998

Peter Dwyer
Aramiha Harwood
Debra Tyler

Youth Research Centre
Faculty of Education
The University of Melbourne

June 1998

INTRODUCTION

This Research Report presents a progress analysis of our large longitudinal study of young Victorians who were planning to finish their schooling in 1991. The original data base included 29,155 participants, who were resurveyed a year later. In 1995, a matching sample of 10,985 from the original set was contacted again to provide an up-date on their progress since 1991. Then in 1996, 1997 and now again in 1998 we have conducted a detailed annual survey with a representative sample of about 2,000 (composed mainly of those still involved with further study), as well as individual interviews with a sub-sample of 100.

We intend to continue this annual process through to the end of the year 2000, which will thus provide us with a ten-year-long record of their life-patterns, choices and careers. Because the participants are now in their mid-twenties and have nearly all completed their full-time courses of study, it seems appropriate at this stage to draw together our overall findings, prepare the ground for the next three years of the Project and offer an analysis of some of the main theoretical implications of the research so far.

In presenting this progress report, we would like to acknowledge the ready cooperation and substantial contributions of all the participants over the years of the longitudinal study. It has been our practice to provide them with regular reports on our surveys and interviews and give them the opportunity to comment in return, and for us one of the most rewarding aspects of the study has been the feed-back we have received from them - not only on the research itself but on all aspects of their lives. We owe them a lot.

First published June 1998 by the:

Youth Research Centre
Faculty of Education
University of Melbourne
Parkville 3052

Phone: (03) 9344 9633
Fax: (03) 9344 9632

ISBN 0 7340 1392 2

© Youth Research Centre

All rights reserved. No part of this report may be reproduced or utilised in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the Youth Research Centre.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Youth Research Centre, the Faculty of Education or The University of Melbourne.

Contents

Tables and Charts 4

1. The Context 5
- Background 5
- The Significance of the Research 6
- Participant Views 7
- Completing the Picture 10

2. Details of the Research 1991-1997 12
- Background Data: 1991-1996 12
- Follow-Up Data: 1996-1997 14

3. Typologies of Transition 19
- Comparisons with Non-Completers 19
- The ARC Project 21
- Vocational Integration 22
- A Life Patterns Typology 25
- Linking the Typologies 28
- Reviewing the Typologies 30

Progress Summary 32

4. The Problems of Choice 33
- Personal Histories 35
- Risk and Choice 39
- Inside the Bell Jar 41
  - Structural Influence 41
  - Awareness of Structural Limitations 45
- Conclusion 49

Appendix A: The Life Patterns Typology 51

Appendix B: Identifying the VOCAM Typology Groupings 54

References 57

Tables and Charts

Table 1:	Differences between VET and University Respondents (%)	8
Table 2:	The 1991 Data-set and its 1992 Follow-up	12
Table 3:	1996 Respondents' Details	13
Table 4:	Enrolment	13
Table 5:	Eventual Post-school Study Participation	13
Table 6:	Changes amongst total Student Participants	14
Table 7:	1996 Career Outcomes	14
Table 8:	1997 Interim Sample Details	15
Table 9:	1997 Feelings About Progress	15
Table 10:	Situation Regarding Post-school Studies	15
Table 11:	Main Area of Study	16
Table 12:	Gender Enrolment Patterns and Field of Study	16
Table 13:	Current Employment Situation (1997)	16
Table 14:	1997 Link of Studies with Current Job	17
Table 15:	Fields of Study and 'genuine career prospects'	17
Table 16:	1996 Vocational Outcomes	22
Table 17:	Vocational Integration Typology: 1997	23
Table 18:	Year of Completion for the Integrated	24
Table 19:	Completed Studies and Employment Outcomes	24
Table 20:	Life-Patterns of Total Respondents (VOCAM) (1996)	26
Table 21:	Revised Life-Patterns (VOCAM)	27
Table 22:	Typology A: Vocational Integration (Provisional)	28
Table 23:	Typology B: VOCAM Life-Patterns	28
Table 24:	Career Outcomes of Life-Pattern Typology Groupings	29
Table 25:	Work of the Integrated	31
Table 26:	Changing Social Indicators	33

Chart 1;	Non-school 15-19 year olds, May 1995	20
Chart 2:	Shifting Distribution of Non-completers	21
Chart 3:	Vocational Integration (1996)	23
Chart 4:	Degrees of Integration - 1997	23
Chart 5:	Increasing Integration	24
Chart 6:	Life-Patterns - Revised Sample 1998	27
Chart 7:	Contrasting Integration	29

Appendices:

Question 27:	Attitudes Towards Work/Study Combinations	54
Table A1:	Core Typology Items	55
Table A2:	Core Typology respondents	55
Table A3:	Additional Typology Items	56
Table A4:	Total Typology Respondents	56

1. THE CONTEXT

The Project under consideration in this report is one that goes under the general heading of *Life-Patterns of the Post-1970 Generation.* It is utilising a large database of about 29,000 young Victorians who completed their schooling in 1991 and 1992. This Research Report pays particular attention to our follow-up work to an ANTA-funded research study conducted by the Youth Research Centre in 1996. The title of the Project was *Participant Pathways and Outcomes in Vocational Education and Training: 1992-95.* Its overall objective was:

> *to examine student aspirations, experience and outcomes in order to identify barriers to participation in and effective delivery of programs in Vocational Education and Training.*

Since completing that project, we have resurveyed and interviewed the participants and have begun gathering further details from them as part of an ARC Large Grant which will enable us to follow them through to the year 2001. By then we shall have built up a ten-year profile of their post-school lives.

Background

Since the mid-eighties there has been a substantial redefinition of the agenda for youth and education policy, and a target has been set for as many as 95 per cent of 19 year olds to be participants in post-compulsory education and training by the year 2001. One of the purposes of the *VET Participant Pathways and Outcomes Project* was to concentrate particularly on the views and experiences of young people themselves in the belief that effectiveness of programs is directly related to the extent to which they are accessed by and prove successful to those for whom they are supposedly designed. This has a direct bearing on the implementation of policy regarding education and training programs measured in terms of the degree of match between stated objectives and actual outcomes.

It is clear from the research evidence that current student aspirations are considerably influenced by the fact that Year 12 outcomes have been over-identified with a single post-school option - that of the university. VET remains as the other option, but unfortunately in the minds of likely participants an unwelcome one. The DEET study of New South Wales Year 10-12 students, for example, has shown that only 15 per cent actually planned to go to TAFE and, of those who did not, 51 per cent had considered it 'but decided against it'. Furthermore, 'the perception that university is better than TAFE increases as a reason for not considering TAFE as students progress through secondary school' (DEET, 1993: 44).

Given the negative perceptions of VET pathways at the secondary school level, direct first-hand evidence from participants in the VET options after the completion of their schooling enables us to assess more effectively policy outcomes and devise

ways of overcoming student resistance to, or misconceptions about, the vocational pathway advocated in current policy.

The Significance of the Research

The VET Project reflected the commitment of the Youth Research Centre to undertake major research projects with an emphasis on consultation with and participation by young people themselves. This is a significant aspect of the Project because, although young people are often the specific 'objects' of major policy decisions, or narrowly defined 'target groups' for study and research, they are often denied 'active voice' in the shaping of those policies or in the evaluation of the study or research findings. As the Finn Committee (1991: 56) itself admitted, often the time frame affecting the policy process does not 'permit the completion of either the careful, detailed work or the extensive consultation that must be part of any successful development and implementation of major change in the areas of curriculum, assessment and reporting'.

The Youth Research Centre staff share a perspective whereby research participants or 'subjects' are given 'active voice' in the shaping, the conduct or the evaluation of the research. We give priority to a research process that provides a participant response on the effectiveness of planning and policy implementation. While a considerable range of data has been developed in recent years on levels of participation in education and training within Australia, much of this data has been of a general kind, with comparatively few empirical studies that have tested the assumptions of the policy documents against the actual experience of students. The *VET Participant Pathways and Outcomes Project* was therefore designed to fill a serious gap in the existing knowledge about the sense young people themselves make of the pathways they take, whether the stated goals of policy square with their aspirations and outcomes, and whether the delivery of programs allows sufficiently for changes of interest and vocational focus on the part of particular individuals or for transfers between the University and VET sectors. The metaphor of 'pathways' adopted at a policy level needed to be tested against the actual choices of the participants.

To achieve this, both quantitative and qualitative research techniques were used. From the initial 1991 batch of Victorian students, in 1996 we extracted a selected sample of about 100 for interviews and about 2,000 to participate in a large questionnaire. The questionnaire included 63 items covering the students' backgrounds, living situations, work and study involvement, as well as some broader questions on their life experience and expectations about the future. A final section was also provided to elicit personal comments from the participants about the issues raised.

The findings from the interviews and the questionnaire have been made available in Research Report 14 of the Youth Research Centre (Dwyer *et al*, 1997).

Participant Views

A significant feature of the *VET Participant Pathways and Outcomes Project* was that it filled a gap in our knowledge of student assessments of the value and impact of the VET courses they had undertaken. The available research on student attitudes towards VET was largely concerned with the prior expectations of students at the secondary school level, and there was clear evidence in such studies of considerably negativity and a strong preference for university rather than TAFE enrolment. The main studies of this kind that served to provide background data for our project were those by Mageean (1991), Chapman and Smallwood (1992), Sweet (1992), and DEET (1993, 1994).

The contrast between these prior findings and the responses of the VET participants themselves was a major result of the Project. The data call into question prevailing ideas concerning educational 'pathways' and linear models of transition from school to work via post-compulsory education and training. Providing the student participants with 'active voice' about their own transitions into adult life reveals a dissonance between their actual choices and outcomes and the assumptions on which policy settings have relied.

It is also clear from both the interview sub-set and the larger survey sample that, on reflection, the evidence concerning participants' experiences of, and considered judgements about, their VET pathways is overwhelmingly positive. There is a dramatic contrast between the prior negative attitudes of the participants towards VET in their final year at school and their subsequent high levels of regard. For many of the participants the opportunity to reflect back on their pathways from school into VET has either served to make them aware of the value of VET as a post-school option or to reinforce their conviction that it had proved to be a much better option than they had envisaged while still at school. Putting this in more individualised terms, it is evident from the interviews held with particular students and also from the open-ended question at the end of the large questionnaire that for many of the participants being involved in the research program had had an immediate impact on their understanding and appreciation of making the VET option.

Various questions in the large survey revealed this change of attitude and carried with them indications of significant contrasts between VET respondents (including those who had undertaken studies in *both* the university and VET sectors) and those who only had experience of university courses. The main areas of contrast are shown in Table 1 (over).

Table 1. Differences between VET and University Respondents(%)

		agreement	disagreement
I think universities are over-rated	uni only	30	
	uni/VET	49	
	VETonly	61	
TAFE should be more highly regarded	uni only	59	
	uni/VET	75	
	VETonly	80	
TAFE is for those who miss out	uni only		55
	uni/VET		61
	VETonly		68
worth recommending to others	**uni only**	**58**	
	uni/VET	**85**	
	VETonly	**86**	
generally well-organised	uni only	24	
	uni/VET	67	
	VETonly	75	
generally well-taught	uni only	23	
	uni/VET	69	
	VETonly	81	
generally better than I'd expected	uni only	10	
	uni/VET	53	
	VETonly	62	

As one person said, *"Always thought that uni was IT, everyone had to get into uni if they could"*. In this pro-university atmosphere, VET was looked down upon - as another saw it, *"TAFE was second best to uni; especially at the end of year 12. I would have repeated at the end of year 12 if I hadn't gotten into uni"*. After the event, the majority of those who had done TAFE said they had reappraised the situation: *"TAFE has got me where I am so I am not complaining"; "Best two years of my life"*; while many of those who had done both VET and University studies preferred VET: *"In uni you just line up and you are doled out your education. You'd be told x=y=z, but you wouldn't know what it meant"; "At uni you're still not taught industry skills, they only prepare you for what they are going to teach you in third and fourth year"*; university is *"Too theoretical on its own, you need TAFE to provide the practical side"*.

This turn around in attitudes was put bluntly by one participant: At first, *"I wouldn't have been proud to tell people I was going to TAFE; I'm embarrassed to tell people, I'll say I'm at RMIT, rather than RMIT TAFE"*. And then on reflection: *"I now tell people I go to TAFE and I don't flinch."*

The importance of these comments is that they emerged within the process of the interview as each participant thought more carefully after what they had done since leaving school and whether it was worthwhile. Further evidence of this kind also emerged from questionnaire responses which specifically identified participation in the research as a key factor.

The survey questionnaire answered by about 2,000 participants was a comparatively long and detailed one consisting of 63 fixed response questions. At the end of the survey form a further half-page section was provided for the participants to comment in their own words on any of the issues raised in previous sections. About forty per cent did so, with many adding additional pages in what constituted mini-essays on their experiences and even their philosophy of life. They commented explicitly on the fact that the survey itself had prompted them to reflect in this way, making observations like *"It has been very interesting to reflect back on the last few years and my feelings about what has happened"; "This survey has really made me think about myself and goals and ambitions."* One respondent describes the process of completing the survey as remembering and recognising the 'building blocks' that go towards making you what you are today: *"Such questionnaires as this help show how much one has had to learn, strive for, develop and grow to the stage they are in now."*

In terms of the effects of this self-reflection there were several examples given by the respondents themselves, which indicate possible personal and relationship changes to these peoples' lives as a result of the survey: *"It is ironic this survey should arrive at this time, as I have only just realised the huge sacrifices I have made regarding my personal life and am now attempting to put much more focus on the development of this side of my life"; "My parents treat me like a child and I can't stand it anymore, the questionnaire just pointed it out for me."* Doing the survey itself may also indicate some therapeutic value for the participants, an opportunity for them to communicate with another person without fear of being known or identified: *"Thankyou for listening, it's nice to tell someone your true feelings for once"; "Thank-you - I feel much better since doing this."* If anything, so many of the participants enjoyed the process of completing their questionnaires and the opportunity to speak their minds that they went beyond the requirements for their comments on post-school training and life so as to talk about **everything** in their lives. A large portion of survey-returns contained extensions on comments - written on extra sheets of paper - so people could fully express their ideas and emotions: *"I would explain my reasoning in depth but you've not left me enough room to write - I could've wrote a 3000 word essay on this topic"; "Many more experiences and not enough room to write!"*

Inherent in this participation was an underlying knowledge (or hope) that the respondents' returns would provide some useful purpose - people wanted to put across what they saw was wrong with the world, in the hope that we, the researchers, would acknowledge these problems. All sorts of difficulties - from the personal (Austudy, finance, course difficulties, parents/boyfriend/girlfriend) to the social ('Bloody Jeff'/'patriarchal institutions and government'/'the great goddess') - and possible solutions were passed on in commentary. (*"In essence we punish people for being stupid or ugly, through no fault of their own, good luck in stopping this!";*

"Definitely more work experience is a requirement for the future generations. Hope you find my input helpful"; "I think these surveys are great, it's good to know someone is considering ways to try and improve the future. I'm happy to answer these surveys.") Some respondents were more explicit in their participation, wanting to know the results of their survey, and what it was going towards: *"Some more information about what the survey is in aid of would be appreciated - by agreeing to fill in this one I've indicated some interest."* Many respondents also wanted the research to take into account aspects of their diverse lives - *"I was shocked that religion was not included as an option in positive aspects of a person's life"; "Another question could be whether or not your parents are divorced or not."* Other suggestions were for future surveys to recognise those who had lost their parents early in life, some who never grew up in a town or a city, homosexuals, single parents. This indicates that respondents are not only participating in the hope of changing the world - they are also involving themselves in the research itself.

What is important here is not the individualised concerns noted in relation to their own experience and priorities but the accumulated evidence from responses of the participants as a whole. Thus, although all young people in the study were engaging in post-secondary education and training with the broad goal of achieving educational credentials, their own understandings of what this meant to their lives were varied, reflected in complex *patterns* rather than 'pathways'. Most had combined both work and study since leaving school, and the reported combinations of work and study and the varying attitudes towards those combinations indicated the degree of overlapping there is between the two worlds of school and work, the different meanings the combinations assume in the minds of different students, and the different ways in which the combinations are negotiated and balanced. It is significant that most of the respondents took some kind of combination for granted, and that even in terms of preferences 'work without study' or 'study without work' were only favoured by a minority.

Evidence of this kind raises complex issues about the relationship between the process of policy formation and the impact of research. It is obvious from the accumulated evidence of the set questions in the survey, and from the more 'personal' responses to the open-ended question, that most of the participants are actively interpreting and responding to the policy settings and research designs in ways which suggest that neither the settings nor the designs adequately reflect the complexity of the participants' decision-making. In effect, through the medium of their own 'practice' they are challenging predicted policy outcomes.

Completing the Picture

One of the main advantages of using both qualitative and quantitative techniques is that it enables us to fill in the details that tend to be missed if only one type of approach is used. This has certainly been our experience in the course of this project. The interviews provide an opportunity to pursue particular themes and personal priorities in some depth, and often uncover the hidden or unexpected motivations for the choices that have been made by the different individuals concerned. The surveys achieve the purpose of extending the breadth and scope of inquiry in a way

that exposes common concerns and patterns that re-inforce (or in some cases modify) the individual stories expressed in the interviews. Some of those stories have been alluded to in this chapter. Key elements from the more general survey data will form the substance of the next chapter, with an emphasis on the gradual unfolding of general trends as we follow the progress of the survey group as a whole.

2. DETAILS OF THE RESEARCH: 1991-1997

This chapter draws together key elements of the accumulated data in our longitudinal study. The study has been extended for a further three years (1998-2000) to cover the career outcomes of the participants, so it is useful at this stage to do a kind of audit of what we have already found.

Background Data: 1991-1996

The study began with a survey of 29,155 Victorians leaving school in 1991, and who completed a 1992 follow-up survey on what they had done since. In preparation for a more detailed analysis of student outcomes in 1996, the evidence from the previous surveys was reviewed and a consistent data-set of the 1992 respondents was established for 11,000 of the original 1991 participants. The comparative data for the 1991 and 1992 sets are provided in Table 2.

Table 2. The 1991 Data-set and its 1992 Follow-up

	1991 % (n= 29,155)	1992 % (n= 10,985)
from Year 10	12	12
from Year 11	13	12
from Year 12	76	77
intended post-school study/studied	73	75
study for apprenticeship	14	14
study as traineeship	7	7
intended working/worked	26	25
female	52	56
male	47	44

In 1996, the 1992 data-set of 11,000 was re-surveyed and this was followed by a subsequent interview sample of 100 and a questionnaire-sample of about 2,000. The sample was narrowed down to concentrate on those who had undertaken further study on leaving school. It included students from both urban and rural areas, covering a representative range of school (60 per cent from Government schools) and ethnic (with one third of parents born outside Australia) backgrounds, and a variety of parental educational attainment (close to half not having completed high school).

Apart from the concentration on continuing students, the only other significant variation from the original sample (as is often the case in longitudinal studies of this kind) was an increase in the relative proportion of female respondents. Throughout the subsequent studies, in the analysis of data, care has been taken to allow for this shift. The overall constitution of the 1996 sample population is given in Table 3.

Table 3. 1996 Respondents' Details (n = 1,908)

	%
From Government Schools	60
completed Year 12	93
Female	65
Australian-born	88
A-Born Female Parents	65
Male Parents with less than Yr 12	44
From Metropolitan areas	63
TAFE/VET post-secondary study	45
Completed studies	60

The 1996 follow-up of the original participants was directed mainly at those who had gone on to further study on leaving school. Thus, of the respondents, 90 per cent had undertaken courses since 1992, with two-thirds spending at least three years. Nearly 80 per cent had made the university their first preference, but initially only 64 per cent gained university entry. Although only 11 per cent had sought entry into TAFE as their first preference, 24 per cent actually enrolled directly on leaving school. The difference between preferences and initial enrolments are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Enrolment

	Preference (%)	Outcome (%)
university	78	64
TAFE	11	24
Apprenticeship	4	3
Traineeship	1	1
Other	6	8

By 1996, some university entrants had also undertaken TAFE or other VET courses and overall enrolments in VET had increased to a level of 45 per cent of all respondents. The eventual distribution of students in the various post-school sectors is shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Eventual Post-school Study Participation

	No.	%
VET only	460	27
University only	916	54
VET and University	296	(18)

Partly reflected in this move into the VET area, is the fact that *over 50 per cent* of our sample had made a change of some kind (institution, course, deferral etc) during their years of post-school study rather than staying on a linear track (Table 6). There is nothing new in this - but it is an aspect of student enrolment to which insufficient attention has been paid in the past.

Table 6. Changes amongst total Student Participants (n = 1717)

Changes	No.	%
A. changed institutions	351	20
B. changed courses	425	25
C. interrupted studies	250	15
D. discontinued	264	15
Total excluding multiple changes	**887**	**52**

In mid-1996, 1143 (60 per cent of the total) indicated that they had already completed their studies, with 935 (49 per cent) in full-time employment. A minority of 34 per cent reported that they had been able to gain positions in their 'preferred career area', with 20 per cent in a 'stepping stone' job related to that career (Table 7).

Table 7. 1996 Career Outcomes (n= 1866)

Employment Situation	No.	%
I have a job in my preferred career area	646	34
in a 'stepping stone' job related to that career	380	20
in a job not directly related to that	335	18
in a job, without career in mind for myself	151	8
no job at present	354	19

Follow-up Data: 1996-1997

The background data of the participants offered an initial picture of their pathways leading from school and via further education towards an eventual adult career. The fact that only 34 per cent had found a career for themselves perhaps reflected the far-reaching changes which had taken place within the labour market (Gregory, 1995; Rifkin, 1995; Reich, 1991) as they were engaged in their studies. Other research (Redpath, 1994; Trottier, Cloutier and Laforce, 1996; Dwyer, 1997) showed that those completing their post-compulsory education in the 1990s were likely to face very different types of career-paths and specialised employment from those enjoyed by their predecessors. Not only had the outcomes of post-compulsory education become less predictable, but the increasing flexibility of labour markets now called into question established assumptions about the likelihood of life-long permanent career attainment.

Nevertheless, after six years had passed since the end of school, there were members of our original sample who had moved beyond what might be regarded as the 'transition' stage. Thus, from amongst our total research participants (n=1926), there were 938 (49 per cent) who indicated in 1996 that they had already attained a career job within 3 years of graduating but even so most of these were willing to continue to participate in our on-going study.

For the purposes of testing some of our previous findings, in mid-1997 we undertook an interim survey with a revised sample of 1334 participants, with one major proviso

that there was no further shift in the relative proportions of female and male respondents. Some general background features of the sample are given in Table 8, which indicate that our revised sample was consistent with the 1996 data-set.

Table 8. 1997 Interim Sample Details (n = 1334)

	1996 %	Revised %
From Government Schools	60	56
Female	65	65
Australian-born	88	89
A-Born Female Parents	65	65
Male Parents with less than Yr 12	44	43
From Metropolitan areas	63	64

Many of the respondents had mixed feelings about their overall progress in achieving their main priority in life. While the majority seemed more or less satisfied, about three-quarters were expecting things to improve in the near future, and significant numbers of participants were either running into difficulties (23 per cent) or did not feel that they were achieving what they wanted (37 per cent).

Table 9. 1997 Feelings about Progress

	No.	%
I'm happy enough with where I've reached	518	39
I feel real fulfilment about what I'm doing	743	56
It's proving difficult to feel fulfilment	305	23
I don't feel yet that I'm achieving what I want	491	37
I expect things to improve in the near future	985	74

It is interesting to note that, although most of the participants had left secondary school in 1991, many of them, even in 1997, were still involved with study, either because they had not yet qualified or because they had re-enrolled for further study of some kind.

Table 10. Situation Regarding Post-school Studies

	No.	%
incomplete, re-enrolled	263	20
completed, re-enrolled	192	14
completed, not re-enrolled	537	40
discontinued	126	9
none of these	199	15

There was a wide distribution of participants in different fields of study. The main areas are indicated below.

Table 11. Main Area of Study

	No.	%
trade apprenticeship	77	6
arts/social sciences	150	11
business/economics	244	18
engineering/surveying	88	7
medicine, dentistry	51	4
technology, computing	102	8
law	46	3
nursing,health	126	9
education	92	7
maths, science	168	13

There were some variations between male and female enrolment patterns in the various fields of study as can be seen from the following table.

Table 12. Gender Enrolment Patterns and Fields of Study

	Female %	Male %
trade apprenticeship	1	14
arts/social sciences	14	5
business/economics	17	20
engineering/surveying	2	14
medicine, dentistry	4	4
technology, computing	4	12
law	3	4
nursing,health	13	2
education	9	2
maths, science	13	12
other	20	11
TOTAL	**100**	**100**

By late 1997, 40 per cent of the participants indicated that they had completed their initial qualifications and had not re-enrolled. Nevertheless, 59 per cent of the total sample indicated that they already had full-time jobs.

Table 13. Current Employment Situation (1997)

	No.	%
full-time job	784	59
part-time job	266	20
self-employed	26	2
parenting &/or home duties	15	1
unemployed, seeking work	83	6
other	123	9

Of those participants who were in jobs, 43 per cent considered that they had found 'genuine career prospects directly related' to their field of study. A further 10 per cent had also found genuine career prospects but in their case the positions were 'not directly related' to their field of study.

Table 14. 1997 Link of Studies with Current Job (Age: 23-24)

	No.	%
genuine 'career' prospects directly related to field of study	572	43
not yet a 'career' job but directly related to field of study	159	12
genuine 'career' prospects NOT directly related to field of study	132	10
not yet a 'career' job and NOT directly related to field of study	96	7
a 'career' job NOT in field of study but being qualified helped	33	2
NOT a 'career' job, NOT in my field but being qualified helped	50	4
So far qualifications have not made much difference for work	107	8

These 'genuine career prospects' varied according to the specific field of study that had been entered into by particular respondents. There were significant variations in career outcomes, although at this stage some allowance needs to be made for those who are either yet to complete their initial qualifications or who have re-enrolled for further study of some kind. The relationship between career attainment and field of study is displayed below.

Table 15. Fields of Study and 'genuine career prospects' (n= 716)

	No.	% of field
trade apprenticeship	59	77
arts/social sciences	86	57
business/economics	147	60
engineering/surveying	42	48
medicine, dentistry	11	22*
technology, computing	50	49
law	21	46*
nursing,health	86	68
education	61	66
maths, science	71	42

* the majority of medicine and law students were still doing studies

These data extending over a six-year period from 1991 to 1997 call into question policy assumptions about a linear 'pathway' from school via further post-compulsory education and training into an eventual career. It is obvious that, given the move to more flexible and deregulated labour markets, outcomes from post-compulsory education are now less straightforward and take longer to achieve with less of a guarantee of a 'movement through a coherent set of educational and employment experiences leading to some identified destination' (Finn, 1991: 94).

Underlying the patterns of change in the pathways of young people in English-speaking nations, there is an increasing mismatch between levels and types of qualifications and the actual employment or career outcomes of education within the first three years after entry into the labour market (Dwyer, 1997). Canadian data suggest that only one graduate in three sees a direct link between their university education and the labour market, and that they face 'vocational integration problems: job instability, underemployment, 'inappropriateness' of their training in relation to the job, disparity of integration conditions according to the field of studies' (Trottier et al, 1996: 92). Our findings so far in this Project tend to confirm that analysis.

The next chapter of this Working Paper concentrates on a further stage aimed at examining the effects of this growing unpredictability of outcomes due to changed economic circumstances and the restructuring of the Australian economy.

3. TYPOLOGIES OF TRANSITION

The Canadian researchers Côté and Allahar (1994) describe the post-1970 generation of young people as a *Generation on Hold*. It is a tempting image in that it captures the uncertainties that the generation faces. There is the widening gap between their aspirations as high-achieving, well-credentialled young adults and harsh economic realities. They are faced with narrowing competitive employment markets and the postponed fulfilment of economic and family security which their parents had encouraged them to ambition.

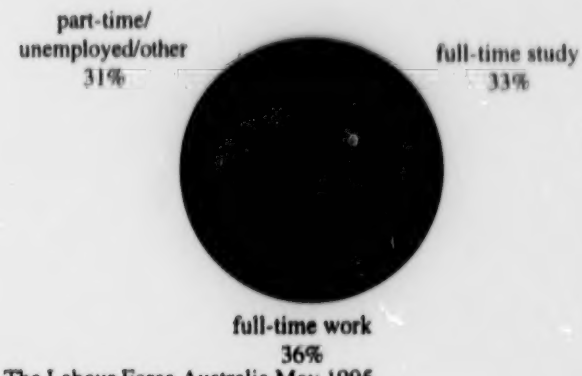
The results of our surveys suggest a different image. Rather than a 'Generation on Hold', those in our study are negotiating reality for themselves by 'weaving' interconnections or patterns within their lives. There is a sense of maintaining a vision of the future, using the present to build a base for that future, and being ready to take up opportunities that might occur. There are changes of initial direction, setbacks and even 'u' turns - the *process* is not a straightforward linear one, but it is certainly not 'on hold'.

It is worth commenting here that this process of weaving interconnections and taking up whatever opportunities are on offer is not unique to those who have continued on to further study beyond secondary school. While their chances of gaining employment for themselves are greater than those of non-completers, finding and continuing in some kind of career path present variations, risks and complexities that are very similar to those we have identified in our previous studies of early school leavers (Dwyer and Holden, 1992; Holden, 1992, 1993; Wyn and Holden, 1994). For this reason, before moving to the next stage of our Life-Patterns Project some of the evidence from those previous studies merits inclusion here.

Comparisons with Non-Completers

In May 1995 there were 1,266,100 persons in the 15 to 19 age group in Australia, and of these 49 per cent were still completing secondary school. Of the remaining 51 per cent or about 646,000, there were 200,800 who had progressed beyond school, but were not in further full-time study or enjoying the benefits of full-time work. They were either not in the workforce (42,000), or only in part-time jobs (71,300) or else unemployed (87,500). Because of recent policy preoccupations, it is worth emphasising here that those outside or on the margins of the full-time study and work categories thus effectively constitute about one-third of the non-school age group. They are, therefore, virtually on a statistical equal footing with their more successful counterparts (Chart 1), even though they lack the advantages of those who have been able to choose either full-time study or full-time work as a basis for on-going security in their lives. Their choices are undoubtedly constrained.

Chart 1: Non-school 15-19 year olds, May 1995



Source: ABS The Labour Force Australia May 1995.

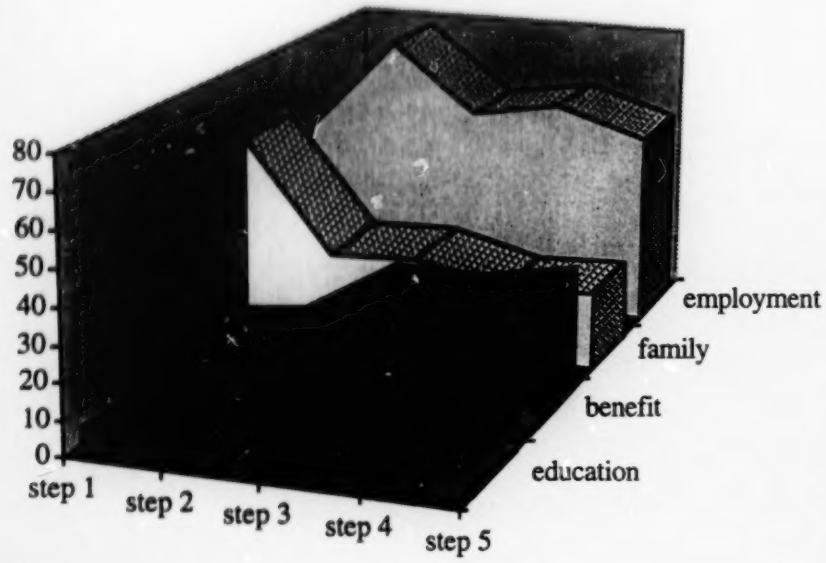
What is of particular interest in the present context, however, is that those with restricted chances still appear to define their lives in terms of choice, despite the constraints. In the Youth Research Centre three-year longitudinal study of Victorian early school leavers the overwhelming majority quit school because they felt that 'anything is better than school' (Holden and Dwyer, 1992: 1), and yet most in reflecting back on their decision remained convinced that 'at the time it was the right thing to do' or that they were 'glad' or 'lucky' they left when they did. This positive view is supported by the Ainley and Sheret study of senior secondary students in New South Wales. Overall, 91 per cent of all the early leavers surveyed indicated that they were happy to have left, and this even included over half (58 per cent) of those who had been unable to find any work or training since (Ainley and Sheret, 1992: 157).

This choice to leave obviously carries risks with it, but again what is surprising in the research findings is the readiness of the school non-completers to adapt and adjust in the face of constraints. They try out various alternative situations for themselves, or they change direction, reverse prior decisions, or straddle a number of different interests or commitments. Thus, in our early school leavers study, each of the participants had moved in and out of different situations which appeared to them to offer some basic security with particular reference to four key variables: either their *family* of origin, or an *employment* opportunity, or a return to *education*, or welfare *benefit* dependency. The following chart gives a picture of the first five moves or changes taken by the different individuals with reference to these four variables, and shows how the balance between the various 'situation options' varied across the whole group with the passage of time.

The chart shows only the first five moves, but as the study points out

> They moved in and out of jobs, back to and away from the family, increasingly depended on welfare benefits, with a handful trying re-entry into education. Some changed course 14 or 15 times - a zigzag of changes as they looked in vain for the supposed pathways. There was no

Chart 2: Shifting Distribution of Non-completers during their 'first five steps'



Source: Dwyer, 1996: 55.

> systematic movement; the pattern was one of short-term, low-paid jobs (when available), mixed with living on unemployment benefits and with the support of friends and family (Dwyer, 1996: 55; 1995: 270).

When we put this kind of evidence alongside that we have regarding those who did complete their schooling, it suggests to us that these mixed combinations of moving in and out of study and work and a series of variable choices are *true of the generation as a whole*. The 'pathways' metaphor is not an accurate guide to what is happening in their lives (regardless of whether they have discontinued with their schooling or have gone on to further study at the post-school level), and the alternative image of a 'generation on hold' fails to take sufficient account of the aspects of 'choice' and movement that the evidence reveals. We need to find or develop some new images or typologies to reflect the new life-patterns.

The ARC Project

Given that the Youth Research Centre had already undertaken a detailed longitudinal study of the choices and life-patterns of early school leavers, it seemed appropriate to match that with a similar study of those who were completing post-school qualifications of some kind. What we were particularly interested in was the extent to which their increased participation in education and training had achieved for them the 'highly skilled' employment outcomes foreshadowed in education and labour market policy documents. Given the evidence on outcomes and the impact of workforce restructuring, how successful are the 'post-school' participants in terms of 'vocational integration', or the blending of their qualifications and their employment options? In late 1997 the Youth Research Centre was funded by the

Australian Research Council to undertake an ARC Large Grant for the three years 1998-2000 aimed at finding an answer to this question. The title of the Project was: *Typologies of Youth Pathways and the Vocational Integration of 1991-96 Post-compulsory Education Participants in a Comparative International Context.*

This Project was designed around two typologies of transition: one related to the process of career attainment or 'vocational integration'; and one related to the more general process of transition into adulthood. The survey and interview sub-sets of our longitudinal study would form the 'subjects' of this new investigation.

Vocational Integration

Our first typology of 'vocational integration' is derived from the research of a number of Canadian scholars. This recent Canadian study, by Trottier, Cloutier and Laforce (1996), examined the career outcomes of Bachelor students three years after they graduated. The increasing uncertainty of outcomes revealed by the data led the authors to develop a three-fold typology of career attainment: the integrated; those in the process of integration; and the inactive.

> The 'integrated' were those who within three years of graduating had achieved a permanent full-time job envisaged as a career choice - 'even if the job is not the one he or she initially hoped for' (p. 94);
>
> those 'in the process of integration' were either not working full-time, or were in a temporary position, or else had a full-time job which was not envisaged as their career job;
>
> and the final group were said to be 'inactive' because of their non-involvement in the labour market (often because they were continuing with post-graduate studies).

Our own research sample seemed particularly suited to an investigation of the extent to which this typology was applicable in the Australian context of graduate outcomes. For this reason, in 1996 and 1997 we used the typology to develop a provisional analysis of the participants in our longitudinal study. This analysis incorporated the data presented in the previous chapter in Table 7, and also made use of a further questionnaire which concentrated more specifically on the career outcomes of the respondents. Table 16 provides the results.

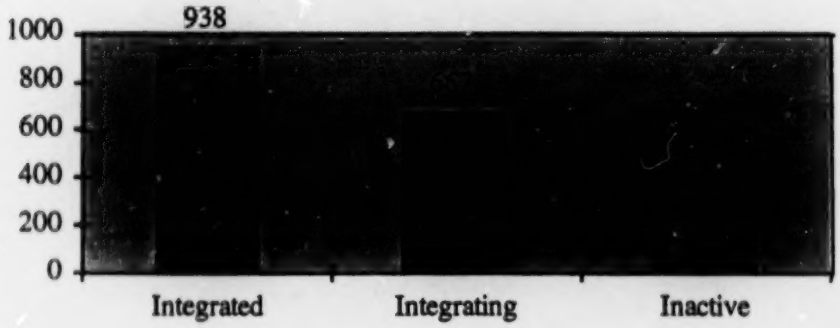
Table 16. 1996 Vocational Outcomes

Type (provisional)	No.	%
Vocationally Integrated	938	49
Integrating	667	34
Inactive	321	17
Total	**1926**	**100**

We must add a cautionary note here. For reasons we shall discuss later, for our provisional analysis we have broadened the definition of the Integrated to include some participants with part-time jobs. This is to allow for their 'subjective' assessment

that their position has genuine 'career' prospects. Despite this broader interpretation, and even after six years of post-school 'transition', it appeared that less than half of our original sample had achieved the type of career outcomes foreshadowed in policy documents. In 1997 there were 938 members (or 49 per cent) of our larger sample who could be *broadly* described as 'vocationally integrated' (Chart 3).

Chart 3: Vocational Integration (1996)



Our interim survey in 1997 reflected this distribution but demonstrated also that with the passage of time there had been a gradual increase in the Integrated category. The typology breakdown of the interim sample is shown in Table 17 and Chart 4.

Table 17. Vocational Integration Typology: 1997

Type (provisional)	No.	%
Vocationally Integrated	716	54
Integrating	411	31
Inactive	207	15
Total	**1334**	**100**

Chart 4: Degrees of Integration - 1997

The following table provides details of those members of the Integrated category who had completed their post-school courses and of the year in which they did complete.

Table 18. Year of Completion for The Integrated

Year of Completion	%
completed by 1995	43
completed by 1996	47
completed by 1997, not re-enrolled	8
completed by 1997, re-enrolled	2
	100

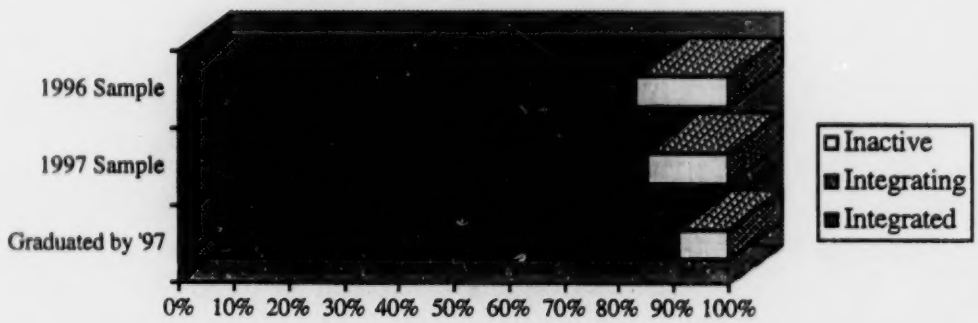
It is significant that by mid-1997 *as many as two-thirds* of those who had already graduated reported that they had found jobs with genuine 'career' prospects, even if there were others who had already gained their first qualification but had not as yet achieved genuine career outcomes.

Table 19. Completed Studies and Employment Outcomes

	No.	%
With Genuine Career Prospects	479	66
In Process	183	25
Inactive	68	9
Total	**730**	**100**

As might be expected, both the passage of time and the effect of completing a course of studies lead to an increase in the relative percentage of those who report that they have achieved career positions for themselves. This shift is represented in Chart 5.

Chart 5: Increasing Integration



We should note, however, that the classification of the participants into the various typology groupings is a provisional one. Further time is needed for the process of 'vocational integration' to produce results, and further detail is called for to determine whether the career prospects of those provisionally classified as Integrated have been consolidated, and whether the inclusion of some not yet in full-time positions can be justified.

One of the main aims of our continuing 1998-2000 research is to test this provisional analysis and extend the examination of 'vocational integration' beyond the first three years after graduation.

A Life-Patterns Typology

The changes affecting the labour market during the 1990s have also had an impact on the processes of transition into adulthood affecting the lives of members of the post-1970 generation of young Australians. Our review of the available research indicates that the established definition of these transitions in terms of certain predetermined linear pathways now fails to do justice to the actual experience and choices of young people. As we have argued elsewhere (Dwyer and Wyn, 1998; Looker and Dwyer, 1998) there is little doubt that, even for those who appear to be 'on track' in terms of the conventional mainstream models and patterns, moving into adult life involves multiple transitions and the balancing of a range of actual or intended commitments. Because pathways into adulthood have become less predictable and now involve increasing complexity of decision, greater attention needs to be paid to the *patterns* of choice and commitment which young people are developing in their lives as they attempt to shape a future for themselves.

With the aim of allowing for this growing uncertainty and complexity, we have re-examined the data with a view to differentiating between the various 'life-patterns' (see Appendix A) manifested in the responses of the participants. There are five major patterns which in our view capture the range of perspectives being adopted (Dwyer and Wyn, 1998).

> In line with established assumptions there is certainly evidence of a **vocational focus** on the part of some respondents (they display a focus on gaining qualifications to enable a career choice to be made). There are other respondents who still give priority to finding a job even independently of completing post-school studies and manifest an **occupational focus** (they give priority to work, with other life-choices subordinate to that). Some of the respondents have revealed a concern with what is best described as a **contextual focus** (in their responses they emphasise the 'life' context chosen, such as family, community, lifestyle, or 'field' of work). Allowance also needs to be made for those who have made definite changes in their study, career or life options by adopting **altered patterns** (they reconsider their original route and change to another destination). Finally, the evidence suggests that many of the respondents actually have a preference for maintaining a balance of commitments in their lives. Their options reveal **mixed patterns** (they place equal value or emphasis on a range of activities or goals.)

It would be wrong to imply that this range of patterns in transitions is unique to the post-1970 generation of students in Western societies. Examples of each of the five have always been part of the total picture of any age-group in transition, although it seems likely that in the past the first two had normative significance. Our reason for explicitly extending the categories of analysis is because of the increasing artificiality of assuming the type of linear sequence restricted to vocational and occupational pathways and outcomes.

At the end of 1996 we conducted a provisional analysis of our research findings to test the applicability of this five-fold typology, and throughout 1997 we conducted some follow-up questioning to validate the results. In terms of the defining characteristics of each of the patterns, the following final distribution of respondents into the various categories emerged (see Appendix B) from the re-analysis of specific items in the data.

Table 20. Life-Patterns of Total Respondents (VOCAM) (1996)

		Persons	Female %	Male %	Total %
Vocational Focus	focus on gaining qualifications to enable a career choice to be made	519	29	25	**27**
Occupational Focus	give priority to work, with other life-choices subordinate to that	254	13	14	**13**
Contextual Focus	choose a 'life' context (family, community, lifestyle, 'field' of work)	191	9	11	**10**
Altered Patterns	reconsider their original route and change to another destination	135	7	7	**7**
Mixed Patterns	place equal value or emphasis on a *range* of activities or goals	809	42	43	**43**
Total		**1,908**			**100**

What is particularly surprising about these results is that the largest group in the typology turned out to be the Mixed Patterns type. If however the linear models of the conventional literature and the policy documents represent the mainstream, we would expect the majority of the respondents to be included under either the Vocational or the Occupational Focus. Our analysis of the survey evidence does not support this, and in terms of the defining characteristics of each of the elements in the typology, the distribution of respondents into the various categories suggests that as many as 60 per cent do not fit the standard or 'normal' biographies associated with a vocational or occupational focus.

The patterns revealed in the study have important policy and research implications. Although all the participants were engaging in post-secondary education and training with the broad goal of achieving educational credentials, their understandings of what this meant to their lives were varied, reflected in complex patterns rather than 'pathways'. As we can see from Table 20, in fact only a *minority* of young people (27 per cent) could be said to have experienced a linear progression through post-compulsory education, with a strong vocational focus. By contrast, the patterns of the majority of young people in the study could not be characterised as linear or as a single focus. Their own perspectives on their experiences provide an insight into the way in which these young people are negotiating and constructing the central elements of their lives and identity.

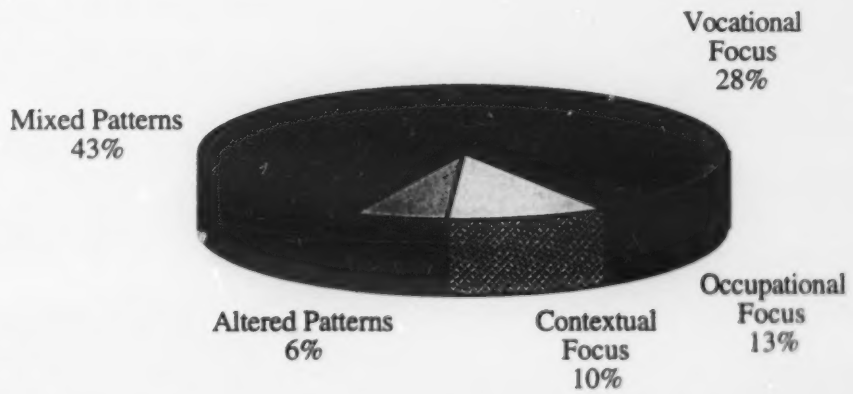
We had used the revised sample of our interim survey in 1997 to test again the validity of this Life-Patterns Typology. We needed to ensure that for the purposes of the ARC Project we had a sound basis for comparing this VOCAM or Life-Patterns

Typology with that on Vocational Integration. The interim survey produced results that were consistent with the various VOCAM groupings. The breakdown for our prior 1996 sample of respondents is provided for the sake of comparison in Table 21, and the breakdown for the Revised sample is represented in Chart 6.

Table 21. Revised Life-Patterns (VOCAM)

	1996 Sample %	Revised Sample %
Vocational Focus	27	**28**
Occupational Focus	13	**13**
Contextual Focus	10	**10**
Altered Patterns	7	**6**
Mixed Patterns	43	**43**
Total	**100**	**100**

Chart 6: Life-Patterns - Revised Sample 1998



This analysis established the fundamental purpose for our continuing 1998-2000 research, which is

> to examine the relationship between the two typologies:
>
> For which of the life-patterns (and to what extent) is 'vocational integration' likely to be a more predictable outcome? or
>
> *Are there processes of negotiating a life-path that are more suited than others to the career outcomes of the restructured workforce?*

Linking The Typologies

It would be useful at this point to summarise the two typologies which are being used in our 1998-2000 ARC Project. The following tables present the main components of each. (Please note that we are provisionally using a modified version of Typology A).

Table 22. Typology A: Vocational Integration (Provisional)

Integrated	The 'integrated' are those who within three years of graduating had achieved a *(likely full-time)* permanent job envisaged as a career choice - 'even if the job is not the one he or she initially hoped for'
Integrating	those 'in the process of integration' were either *not likely to be* working full-time, or were in a temporary position, or else had a full-time job which was not envisaged as their career job
Inactive	said to be 'inactive' because of their non-involvement in the labour market (often because of other priorities or because they are continuing with post-graduate studies)

Table 23. Typology B: VOCAM Life-Patterns

(**V**)ocational Focus	focus on gaining qualifications to enable a career choice to be made
(**O**)ccupational Focus	give priority to work,with other life-choices subordinate to that
(**C**)ontextual Focus	choose a 'life' context (family, community, lifestyle, 'field' of work)
(**A**)ltered Patterns	reconsider their original route and change to another destination
(**M**)ixed Patterns	place equal value or emphasis on a *range* of activities or goals

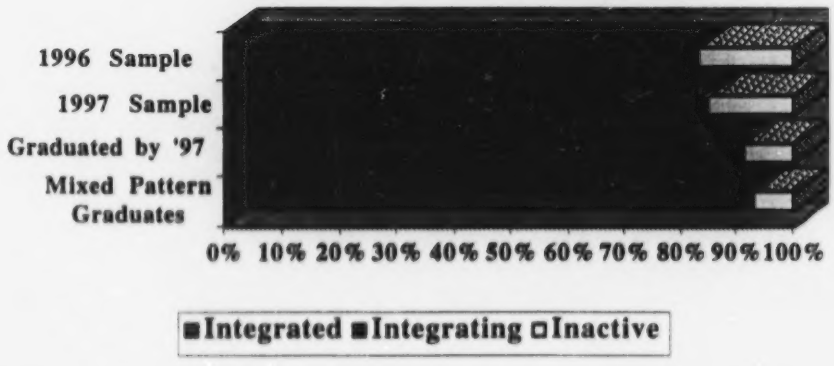
We have undertaken a preliminary examination of the accumulated research findings to form a provisional idea of what kind of link there might be between our two typologies. In terms of their own assessments of having achieved a job with 'genuine career prospects' it appeared that, so far, members of the Mixed Pattern group have been the most successful, with as many as 61 per cent of them in the 'integrated' category as against 54 per cent across the sample as a whole. Table 24 displays these contrasts.

Table 24. Career Outcomes of Life-Pattern Typology Groupings

	Total Sample %	V %	O %	C %	A %	M %
Integrated	**54**	48	**59**	45	47	**61**
Integrating	**31**	34	31	41	41	26
Inactive	**15**	18	10	14	12	13
Total %	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Within the Mixed Pattern group the level of integration is particularly high for those who have already completed their studies. In this group 54 per cent of the members have completed, *and of this number as many as 74 per cent identify their current job as one with genuine 'career' prospects.* The contrasts with other sample groups are shown in Chart 7.

Chart 7: Contrasting Integration


1996 Sample
1997 Sample
Graduated by '97
Mixed Pattern Graduates
0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%
Integrated Integrating Inactive

Because much more detail is needed about what these jobs are and how genuine are the prospects, these findings are only provisional. The typology was not proposed to prejudge outcomes or to categorise particular individuals, but for *investigating* whether one particular Pattern or another was more conducive to vocational integration in response to economic restructuring. The outcome of such investigation will depend on the interviews and questionnaires to be carried out over the next three years.

Reviewing the Typologies

We have used the word 'provisional' a number of times throughout this chapter in discussing the data developed by means of the two typologies. One of the perennial problems of social science research concerns the relationship and compatibility between so-called 'objective' and 'subjective' evidence. This is a particularly difficult problem as far as typologies are concerned, because no matter how good the data are and how careful the analysis, there are always elements of ambiguity and overlap between the separate categories. For this reason, before proceeding into the next stage of our research, it is important to review the two typologies to assess whether the current classification of the data merits reconsideration.

The Life-Patterns Typology. While we remain satisfied with the general lines of this typology, it is worth commenting that sorting out the data involved a complicated series of statistical procedures. The steps of analysis presented in Appendix B are not as simple as they may appear, and in fact we checked the final classifications of the data in five different ways before we were satisfied that the typology was worth persevering with. Since then, in our interim survey of 1997, we have obtained more feed-back from the participants. Consequently, as we point out in Appendix B, we see no reason to attempt a reclassification.

There is, however, a broader question at issue here. Other researchers (Trottier et al, 1996; Anisef & Axelrod, 1993; Teichler, 1989) who have undertaken similar studies of youth in transition point out that balancing the objective evidence about career outcomes and the subjective elements of aspiration and fulfilment is made particularly difficult because the evidence changes over time. Career conditions change and people adjust their expectations and priorities. In our case it is obvious for example that, as participants have graduated and become much more intent on establishing their careers, their 'focus' has shifted from a purely 'vocational' concern to one that is better characterised as 'occupational'.

This was certainly evident in our 1997 interim survey. The proportions of the first two categories of the Life-Patterns Typology have held constant at about the combined 40 per cent level, but the relative proportions have virtually reversed with the 'occupational focus' becoming the dominant category of the two. Despite this *subsequent* shift, however, for the purposes of our on-going study we believe that the original classifications (with 28 per cent 'vocational focus' and 13 per cent 'occupational focus') should be maintained. After all, what we are investigation is the life-patterns which *precede* the process of vocational integration, and for which of the life-patterns (and to what extent) vocational integration is likely to be a more predictable outcome.

The Vocational Integration Typology. Similar issues arise regarding the other typology. There is however a further issue at stake here due to the significant workforce restructuring that has taken place in recent years. There are three key 'objective' elements in the typology developed by Trottier, Cloutier and Laforce: a three-year time-limit, and a job that is both permanent and also full-time.

Unfortunately, the increasing emphasis on flexibility and contingency as a result of new employment practices calls these elements into question. One of the findings of the 1998-2000 Project might well prove to be a re-examination of the Vocational Integration Typology itself. Certainly the assumed one-to-one relationship between notions of 'career' and 'permanent full-time' employment is unlikely to hold up over the course of the study, and is likely to strain the credibility of finding some balance or accommodation between objective and subjective definitions of vocational integration.

For this reason, in our provisional application of the typology we have not insisted on the requirement regarding a full-time position. We are aware that this may only be a temporary deviation from the strict definition but that will depend on obtaining more specific data on the type and conditions of employment amongst our sample. We can however demonstrate the difference the broader definition makes. We can re-examine some of the data on those we have categorised as provisionally Integrated. In our 1997 interim survey of 1334 participants, we classified 716 (or 54 per cent) as Integrated. We did this on the basis of the *subjective* assessments of the participants that they were in a job with genuine 'career' prospects. While our evidence regarding whether those jobs are permanent is not yet complete, we do know that not all of them are full-time. The breakdown of job types for the provisionally Integrated in our 1997 survey is shown below.

Table 25. Work of the Integrated

job-type	No.	%
full-time	564	79
part-time	105	15
self-employed	10	1
other	37	5
Total	**716**	**100**

It is informative that as many as 15 per cent of those who see their present job as one with genuine career prospects are in fact only working part-time. Strictly speaking, on *objective* grounds they should not be included in the category, which means that we would need to revise down our provisional estimate to at most 611 of the 1997 survey sample - or 46 per cent and not the 54 per cent figure we have been using. Obviously, one of the main tasks in future surveys will be to gather much more detailed information on the relationship between the objective and subjective elements with a particular emphasis on revising our provisional classifications.

Progress Summary

1. Our 1998-2000 Project will build on the findings from the annual surveys and interviews conducted since 1995 with selected samples of participants that are representative of the original 1991 data set (apart from the progressive increase of female representation). This variation will be taken into account in any subsequent analysis of the data.

2. By 1997, 54 per cent had already graduated, including the 14 per cent doing additional study. It is worth noting that 52 per cent of our 1996 sample had made a change of some kind (institution, course, deferral etc) during their years of post-school study.

3. Also by 1997, **54** per cent considered that they had found genuine career prospects and, of those who had already completed, this proportion amounted to **66** per cent. Apparently those most likely so far to lay claim to 'genuine' career prospects had either completed a trade apprenticeship (77 per cent of these), or nursing/health (68 per cent), education (66 per cent), and business/economics (60 per cent).

4. With regard to the VOCAM life-patterns typology, the largest sub-group (43 per cent) consisted of those from the Mixed Patterns category. That category, at this stage, also appeared to be the most successful vis-a-vis the Vocation Integration typology, with **61** per cent of them reporting that they had found employment with genuine career prospects, including as many as **74** per cent of those who had already graduated.

5. With regard to the Vocational Integration typology, we have broadened the definition provisionally to include some with part-time jobs. We are investigating whether the strict definition is too restrictive given new workforce realities, but also whether the 'subjective' self-classifications of the participants accurately reflect their real job situations.

4. THE PROBLEM OF CHOICE

One of the major features of YRC research done on youth life-patterns has been the focus on the young individual's choices in their world. As the twentieth century nears its end, the speed of change in the social world and for the individual makes life less predictable. Planning for a future becomes less tenable where the social institutions of work, family and education are not always permanent in function or structure - especially for people who have grown up in the post-1970 generation. A quarter of a century ago, there had been clearly defined markers of the transition from youth to adulthood: leaving home and buying a house, finishing school and starting work, marriage and starting a family. Today, the social structures which accompanied these transitions have changed considerably - employment has lost its permanence, moving from full-time to part-time or contractual work; relationships are less formal and have less commitment attached to them; housing and mortgages, in the context of uncertain income for the long-term future, is not a consideration for many young adults. The figures below demonstrate the ways in which the social 'markers' of adult status have changed since the beginning of the seventies.

Table 26. Changing Social Indicators

	1970s	1990s
Women married-		
aged 20	33%	6%
aged 25	83%	42%
Women mothers-		
aged 25	66%	25%
Men in full-time work		
aged 15-19	49%	22%
aged 20-24	86%	64%
aged 25-34	95%	81%
Women in full-time work		
aged 15-19	46%	13%
aged 20-24	52%	48%
aged 25-34	27%	41%

McDonald, P. (1997)
Young People in Australia today: A socio-demographic perspective

How young people are managing their lives in this late-modern world, and the patterns that emerge from their transitions into adulthood, have now become of major interest in research. More attention is now being paid to the degree of personal 'agency' that is expected of young people in the context of late-modern life: there are more decisions to be made, in the absence of predetermined linear pathways, for the young person. As du Bois-Reymond (1998) sees it, concepts of and choices about life, which previously had been formally determined by the dominant culture of social institutions, have now become more individualised. In turn, this individualisation contributes to a common perception that a weakening of social bonds and structure, as a result of the increased diversity of life experiences, has taken place (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997).

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) argue that, despite this focus on individualised life-choices of young people, there is still strong pressure to behave and live in a **standardised** way - the processes of individualisation are still tightly constrained. Young people are still aiming to follow set patterns or transitions in life - find work, settle down, have a family - which are representative of the 'whole' rather than individual expectations. Thus, while it might be argued that the 'chains of interdependency' (Furlong and Cartmel,1997: 114) remain as strong as ever, the complexity and scope of individual lives mean that it is becoming increasingly difficult to identify or comprehend the social influences that are taking place at the level of individual experience. The focus on individual choices in the late-modern world leads young people to see their own crises as individual problems or failures rather than the outcome of structural processes (eg. closure of government training programs, cuts in education spending, changes to student support, expensive housing). Furlong and Cartmel (1997) suggest that as a result young people hold themselves responsible for not negotiating the transition into adulthood - incorporating work, a house of one's own, and a family - when it is, rather, representative of what they describe as the 'powerful chains of interdependency'.

In summary, while there is a growing recognition that individuality and the choices that go with it constitute the major influence in how young people of the post-1970 generation negotiate their way into adulthood, there is less recognition or understanding given to the social factors which are still an inherent part of their lives. While there is a complexity of patterns and transitions into adulthood, encompassing the many decisions young people make in the context of their lives, there are still desires and outcomes reflecting the chains of interdependency which they share.

Rudd and Evans (1998) maintain that it is difficult to separate or 'disentangle' agency from structural influences and that what is needed is a longitudinal study to establish the 'degree of choice or agency evident' in the decision-making processes adopted by young people who now experience a more complex transition from study to work and generally experience a prolonged dependency on institutions and family to do so. They also emphasise that there have been few attempts to 'explain the incompatibility between young people's perceived feelings of autonomy and control and the alleged 'overarching' often unmediated, influence of deterministic structures on their lives' (p. 60). Wyn and White (1997) concur suggesting that the task of

social analysis is to 'expose the differential capacities of different classes and groups to exercise agency and to reveal the extent of material constraints and limitations as well as opportunities' (p. 6). They emphasise the need to 'give the young people the voice to construct their own stories', and suggest that what then will be revealed is the level of complexity and the many dimensional layers which impact upon their lives (also Heggen 1998).

This chapter endeavours to shed light on some of these issues around the question of young people's agency and the influence structural constraints can have on this. We offer first some individual accounts, or personal histories, of our participants and then move on to discuss the wider social context within which those histories are framed.

Personal Histories

How do the young people in our longitudinal study assess their own capacity for making independent choices and what account do they give of the influence of structural constraints on their lives? In this section we draw on material from the personal responses and interviews of the participants.

Initial Choices. An important starting point would of course be the year that most of this group left school and made 'choices' about their post-compulsory schooling pathways. Our survey was specifically focused upon those young people who had chosen some form of post-compulsory education. They had that choice in common, but almost immediately the experiences of negotiating pathways became more individualised. Many who thought that they had performed 'up to the mark' discovered that they were not successful in gaining a university place because of the steep escalation from 1990 to 1991 in the TER scores by which university places were determined. They were forced to rethink their situation and their goals and make decisions in the light of not gaining their first or even in some cases their sixth preference. Overwhelmingly, most of those affected saw this 'devastating experience' as beyond their control; it was not seen as individual failure, but as a clear instance of the 'system' imposing upon them requirements which they could not hope to possibly satisfy. There was something unique in their reaction to this situation, because they saw it as a generally felt 'common experience', unlike other scenarios where 'individuals' are felt to have failed. Because of this 'no blame, no fault' approach, they were then more able to successfully negotiate an alternate pathway even though for many this was still difficult. In a number of instances students were required to do a complete 'u-turn' in terms of their thinking about their future pathways and make 'choices' which they originally were not comfortable or happy with. For example, enrolling in a TAFE course (even when they thought it was an inferior educational institution and would not lead them as directly towards their goals as they originally wanted) was a reluctant choice for some - but *"I just felt relieved I got into something; I thought I had completely missed out"*.

For many this was the first real experience of the 'system' which they had previously been unaware of; it was their first experience of feeling they had no control over a situation. Simultaneously, it was a severe jolt after the very protective surrounds of their school and their belief that *"any course you want - just study hard and you will*

make it". The mythology had come very much undone; many had uncritically followed the recipe, did the hard work and were then devastated to find that *"it wasn't enough, they changed the rules on us!"*. There was an accompanying anger and frustration that the path they were led to believe would take them to their 'pot of gold' had vanished overnight.

Nevertheless, if these particular students were better able (or more confidently able) at this stage to negotiate their future pathways, it was because of the clarity they had around the structural reasons for their changed situation. The fact that they did not feel a sense of personal failure and the accompanying sense of despair and hopelessness enabled them to move on more quickly and confidently when trying to make decisions about alternative pathways.

Discovering the Risks. The next step is of course to establish how these young people continued to 'negotiate' their pathways. After this initial 'setback' and the recognition that their pathway was not going to be the linear kind, which was still perceived to be the 'right' way, how did they proceed? Did their awareness of structural constraints continue or did the process of individualisation take over their thinking? Did they now feel that it was 'all up to them'? If you are 'aware' that this is the case, does this mean you automatically have a greater sense of agency? Probably not.

The responses are complex and at times contradictory. There is certainly in many cases a growing sense of disillusionment with the 'system'. Even though many see factors such as unemployment as beyond their control, the fact that they are not successful in the job market develops a growing sense of despair. Although many came up bouncing after their first serious knock with the TER scores, the number of knocks since then makes them wonder about their capacity to bounce back and they show their growing frustration with the inequities which they feel promote this.

Many felt that they have been thrust, often totally unprepared, into an unpredictable world where they are expected to do the adult thing; *"just because you have left school everyone thinks you are now an adult and you're suddenly expected to know all sorts of things: how to get your car insured, how to pay tax...."*. The general feeling is that although there is some joy involved in the 'independence' offered by adulthood status there are many more drawbacks - drawbacks which they did not anticipate and often have no skills around (running a house, negotiating a wage with a new employer, dealing with agents in rental situations). There is also a great sense of frustration that all the work they did at school or since at TAFE or university does **nothing** for them in the real world, *"... establishing a healthy social life has been easy, a happy work lifestyle has been a lot harder"*.

In conjunction with this feeling of unpreparedness is the anger about the age at which major or 'life' decisions are being made: *"I was too young to know what I wanted"; " no guidance - no idea"; "there is too much pressure on us at 18 or 19 to know what we want to do, when we haven't a clue"*. Closely connected to this is severe criticism of the school's careers advice system, which at best was described as non-existent. *"I won't get a quid out of it, I should have had better career advice to encourage me to do something I could get a job with"; "I made a choice which I felt was rushed at the end of year 12. I needed more career advice and work*

experience so I could see what I was in for and could feel more confident about the choice I was making". Others commented that much of the decision making was left up to the 'home' and yet 'home' often did not or was not able to provide the necessary support. It was also noted that when the big decisions were left up to the parents, *"...they don't have a clue, they don't know what subject is what, they don't have the skills, or the information"*.

There is a palpable anger that their dream of adulthood is so clouded with difficulties. *" I never thought adult life would get this difficult", "I wasn't prepared for the world"* - there is almost the communal cry of, *"you didn't tell us it was going to be as hard as this, and if you had, we wouldn't have tried it"* - almost as if there is a place to go back to. There is also the shock that comes with the realisation from many that, *" the real world doesn't give two figs about you... you look after number one, that's the way to go"; "I have taken a stand on my views and opinions and I have learnt to look after the one person who counts...me"*.

The transition from school to tertiary education has required so many fundamental changes so quickly (and more so for country people coming to the city for the first time); it was almost too much to deal with for many experiencing so many disappointments at the one time. There is a sense that they feel 'pounded' by the constancy or the relentlessness of the disappointments which they face and feel that they have few skills to manage their situations positively. Unemployment and the increased competitiveness for employment are often mentioned in this context, *"I am concerned that my friends cannot find jobs and what it is doing to them emotionally and how degrading it is to them. No wonder they turn to alcohol and drugs and go on the dole"; "since leaving education, it makes you aware how hard it can be out there when you become an adult, it can also make you harder"*.

There is a sense of disillusionment that many have not been able to achieve employment in the area they trained in, *"many of us who did the same uni course are having trouble finding work, even though we were promised jobs as graduates"*. There is also a feeling that universities and or training institutions should have some responsibility in, *"assisting us to find work after we finish"*, that the end of the degree does not mean the end of the relationship. One suggestion was for a course entitled *"life after completing your course"* it was to involve training in job-seeking skills and how to find resources and information. Often the result of not finding work in the area the young person has trained in is a downgrading of expectations: *"After not getting work in my area I accepted a traineeship in administration, I didn't want to do it but I have to get the experience from somewhere if I want to get a job"*. There are many examples of young people making typical comments such as *"it is not in my area of training but it's a job and that's what counts"*. In general the downgrading of expectations only came after they were unable to get what they wanted regarding employment. When respondents were asked if they had a career job one young person summed up some more generalised feelings on the issue: *"A career? I'm not even certain I will have a job next year let alone a career"*.

This reality check certainly contrasts severely with initial perceptions immediately after leaving school: *" ... finishing my degree will provide me with employment, regular income, independence and enable me to be up to date with my friends who*

are already working". It also highlights the sense of denial that had existed in relation to structural factors which might impact on their capacity to achieve employment. Most respondents began the task of seeking employment with a high degree of optimism which certainly suggests that these young people are either not aware of the potential impact of structural factors (like a reduced market for engineers for example) or do not want to know about it. Many commented that they did want to know, but their other comments about the focus they have decided upon, and their refusal to reconsider that focus, perhaps shed a different light on the desire for information. There is a sense that the *"... yes, I know it will be difficult, but it won't happen to me"* syndrome would take over.

For many there is an enormous amount of frustration because they cannot get a job because they do not have the work experience - the catch 22 syndrome. *"Training is one thing - but it is the experience which counts"; "there is no more on the job training, these jobs don't exist anymore"; "I'm too old at 20 to get part time work - too old and too educated, but then I don't have enough experience to get a position"; "degrees are not seen as useful - you are just 3 or 4 years older than those you are competing with".* The point which seemed to infuriate a number of respondents was the emphasis the employers put on age, *"I studied, but the employer didn't want me - he wanted someone younger for a traineeship which he will probably 'retrench' after 13 weeks and then he'll get another one!".* Although there was an awareness of 'structural' issues there was a corresponding sense of powerlessness because they *"were not young enough"*; so in a sense the awareness of structural constraints did not result in a greater sense of agency - in this case quite the opposite.

Overwhelmingly respondents are aware that continuing or even starting an education is going to cost, there is also an acute understanding that *" money makes the world go around"* and that injustices exist - *"the poor get poorer and nothing really matters".* Questions are frequently posed: Why is AUSTUDY less than the dole? How do I support myself financially when I can't live at home, how is it others who are at home get more dollars than I do? The impact of reduced financial assistance plus additional fees to study is strongly felt. While some simply add the fees into the equation of juggling life and finances (*"when I get the finance together I will return to study"*), others note: *"Up front fees, just a killer for future studies"; "HECS has made change impossible for me even though I am barely out of my teenage years. I feel I have 'zero' chance of a satisfying life".*

Realising Opportunities. For those whose pathway has been relatively straightforward there was a greater sense of self-confidence exhibited, *"I feel I am the trunk of a tree, a tree of opportunities, with thousands of branches beginning to grow".*

For a number of respondents there is certainly a sense that you will only *"get back what you put in". "If an employer sees you as self motivated and you have made a significant commitment by furthering your education you are a much better candidate from the start". The emphasis is clearly on what the individual can offer... "I urge all young people to give more than they receive and they will be rewarded".* The word 'luck' is mentioned regularly in these contexts, confirming a sense that achievement (although on the one hand seen as dependent on what you can bring to the situation) is thought of as relying on a degree of luck. Structural factors such as

the reduced labour market and the increasingly competitive tertiary arena seemingly do not come into the equation. For others there is the temptation to see that their so called 'lack of achievement' is down to their individual fault/blame, *"... I feel the pressure of being unemployed, of being an individual failure, or of having done the wrong course when neither is really true - even though I am tempted to think it"*. Within this 'you get what you deserve' ideology which some have aspired to, there is criticism of what appears to be the ease with which young people are given 'welfare' and there is a strong recommendation that 'payouts' are for the weak and that the government should *"tighten the process"* so as not to encourage the practice.

There is still the message about how much more difficult it is for young people to 'achieve' in today's climate: *"it's getting harder to find work, we can't be choosy"; "having a university degree may help, but it does nothing to guarantee a secure job"*; or similarly, *"one of the most frightening aspects of this working generation would have to be job uncertainty - and all that goes with this: particularly compulsory competitive tendering"*; and finally, *"it's harder these days for young people to follow a dream"*. At the same time, for others there is a sense that they have the capacity to have some control over their lives, and that they are making decisions which they believe have this effect... *" millions of people go to work everyday and hate their job, I don't want to be like that. I will chop and change and do whatever I can to be happy" ,"I couldn't see any future in the job I was in and basically it wasn't even in the area I had trained in, so I am currently looking for a new job. I have always aimed high"; "I keep looking over my shoulder to see if anything better has shown up"*. For one respondent this was her summation of life 'out there', *"it is nice to know when looking back that you've made it this far (and most of it due to yourself) and you've proven that you can take charge of your life: financial, emotional, social"*.

Risk and Choice

There is a plethora of material (Beck 1992, Giddens 1991, Furlong and Cartmel 1997) which discusses the concept of a 'Risk Society'; in general the argument focuses upon the changes young people have to come to terms with in a post-industrial or late-modern society. The emphasis is on the alleged unpredictability and therefore vulnerability young people face when attempting to find their pathway after leaving school, as compared to the predicability that used to be. The 'risk' theory continues with the development of the ideology of individualisation, a process which has the individual solely responsible for their success or failure. One of the implications of this is that young people are now expected to make transitions to a highly differentiated skill market which they are expected to negotiate on an individual rather than a collective level. Structural elements (such as social class, gender, a decreasing labour market) are denied in the equation as **everything** is seen as possible - if only you make the right choices.

Wyn and White (1997) challenge this ideology of individualisation and argue that it overestimates the role young people play in determining their own circumstances. This situation, according to the authors, has been reinforced by perspectives which have young people compartmentalised into isolated, abstract boxes which often tend to deny the influences of economic, social and political structures. They also

emphasise the need to understand youth as a process, rather than the kind of age-category which perpetuates the popular myth that all young people are perched on the brink of an equally promising adult life and that all they need to do is make the right choices for themselves. It may be true that individual agency is becoming increasingly crucial for them, but this does not mean that the *social context* no longer influences a young person's capacity to achieve. 'The playing out of agency is always undertaken within the context of particular structural settings and parameters. What gives any particular instance of agency its social content is the institutional and cultural framework within which it is exercised' (Wyn and White, 1997: 20).

The work by Furlong and Cartmel (1997) further develops this point. They challenge what they see as an 'epistemological fallacy' in late modernity which builds on the understanding that the young person is able to make any choice they like, but that how well or badly they do so is determined by the 'individual effort' they put in. The reality is that individuals are forced to negotiate a set of risks which impinge on all aspects of their daily life, yet the intensification of individualism means that crises are perceived as individual shortcomings rather than the outcome of processes which are often largely outside of an individual's control. The result of this belief or fallacy, they argue, is that young people are 'blind to the existence of powerful chains of interdependency, ... that they frequently attempt to resolve collective problems through individual action and hold themselves responsible for their inevitable failure' (Furlong and Cartmel,1997: 114).

In discussing this increasing insistence on individual 'choice' despite the 'risks', Rudd and Evans (1998) introduce the concept of micro (the individual, the personal) and macro (the structural) considerations when determining what impacts on the capacity of young people to have agency. In their work Rudd and Evans surveyed two groups of college students: one group was located in a buoyant labour market while the other was in a depressed one. Despite these very obvious location differences nearly all students were optimistic about their employment opportunities. The authors felt surprised and confused by this result. If you begin from the premise that the group from the depressed labour market were unrealistic in their optimism then the question needs to be asked, why? What stood out when interviewing the young people was the level of concern surrounding what they had done individually to 'control' their situation. Overwhelmingly the students denied the impact of traditional factors such as social class, gender, family support and highlighted the importance of the individual and what was necessary for them to do. Within the 'individualised society' the individual must learn to conceive of himself or herself as the centre of action, as the planning office with respect to his/her own biography (Beck, 1992). If the young person was not able to negotiate this pathway successfully then it was their fault, possibly because of a lack of determination or effort.

Because of the clear contrasts between individual optimism and objective circumstances, Rudd and Evans argue that there is a need to explain the incompatibility between young people's feelings of autonomy and control and the alleged overarching, often unmediated, influence of deterministic social structures on their lives' (p 60). The challenge is to try and disentangle agency from structural influences, and to do this we need to follow young people's 'agency' over an extended period of time - preferably via a longitudinal study which will enable us to take a

clearer look at both the micro and macro levels and how these impact on students perceptions of their degrees of control.

Inside the Bell Jar

The issues raised by Rudd and Evans are central to this YRC Life-Patterns Project. We see real strength in the fact that we have been able to maintain contact with a particular generation of young people as they come through schooling, tertiary education and entrance into the workforce. A longitudinal study of this scale allows us to find out how individuals operating within the confines of structural limitations or barriers try to overcome them through the choices they make about the patterning of their lives. At the same time, we are aware that inevitably the individuals we have come to know in considerable detail have also subjected themselves to being the subjects of our on-going study - they are (willingly, we believe) 'inside the bell jar' of our research, but (unconsciously, in many cases) also inside the bell jar of structural constraints. This is true at a number of different levels - perhaps best expressed in terms of the following questions.

i) *Can youth transitions from adolescence into adulthood be delineated along the traditional lines of social indicators; i.e socio-economic background, gender, ethnicity, and locality?*

- Do general patterns emerge from the lives of young people which reflect their social background and present situation?

ii) *Are there social/structural influences in young people's desired outcomes?*

- Do they want to have lives that could be considered 'normal' - have long-term work, a house, a family, a car - reflecting social/structural influences?
- Where do these influences come from?

iii) *Are there social/structural limitations in young people's transition into adulthood?*

- Are there structural factors involved that have prevented young people from attaining what they want in life?
- How do they perceive these structural limitations: as something to be negotiated on a personal level, or as an inherent part of larger social issues/change?

In looking at the database we have built up in our longitudinal study - the survey responses and interviews - these questions may be investigated in the context of life-patterns for Australian young people in the post-1970 generation.

Structural Influence

Rudd and Evans (1998), in their qualitative investigation of British students and their study to work transition experiences and expectations, found that people had very little to say about 'social class', 'ethnicity' and 'gender'. These broad categories

were viewed as outmoded or irrelevant - several subjects indicating that they didn't see themselves as belonging to a 'class' of any kind. Proposed reasons for this include the fact that concepts of class, race and gender were not easily identifiable to the respondents (physically or abstractly), and - in the qualitative component of the research - there was a lack of prompting on the facilitator's behalf to discuss these ideas.

Similar problems were experienced in the interviews of both 1996 and 1997/98 YRC projects. Very little was discussed by interviewees in relation to one's social background/situation. A lack of prompting from the interviewer and a project-focus on specific VET experiences could help to explain this. There is, nevertheless, some evidence in both the quantitative and qualitative data which suggests that structural factors still exert an influence.

Social Indicators. In terms of survey responses for the 1997 questionnaire, some identifiable patterns emerged from the quantitative data. For example, as we indicated in chapter 2, particular gender representation in study fields was especially strong. Of the 1334 respondents to the 1997 survey, males were more likely than females to take up: apprenticeships (14% of males compared to 1% of females); engineering and surveying (14% of males compared to 2% of females); and information technology courses (12% compared to 4%). Females were more likely than males to enrol in: nursing or health (13% of females compared to 2% of males); arts and social sciences (14% compared to 5%); and education (9% compared to 2%). Workforce participation rates were relatively the same for both genders, with some differences; eg. there was a higher proportion of females in the part-time workforce (23% compared to 16% of males).

In terms of secondary schooling, almost three quarters of those who came from independent schools went into university courses, whereas at most 41.4% of government school students enrolled in a university course. In contrast, government school students were more likely to try both university and TAFE courses (28.5% of all government school students) than their private school counterparts (7% of all independent school students).

Parental background also reveals some effects on respondents' pathways through post-compulsory education and the workforce. In our 1997 interim sample, children of fathers with a professional or managerial occupation were more likely to enter university (64.4% compared to the norm of 49%) and less likely to take up TAFE studies (14.6% compared to the norm of 23%). Those whose mother had some post-compulsory training were more likely to try VET options (35.65%) than other groups, while children of mothers with a university qualification also tended to focus on university study, 69% of their number doing so.

Metropolitan-based respondents were the most likely to enter university, 56% of them entering a university course, while rural respondents were the least likely, less than one third (31.7%) of them going on to a tertiary institution.

While there are some background factors that seem to emerge from the survey respondents' movements from schools into post-compulsory education, these same social indicators do not carry across into the age where the survey respondents are

entering the workforce and looking to establish careers. For example, gender, socio-economic background (father's profession and mother's education), and locality - in relation to the quantitative data - do not have a statistically significant effect on entrance into the workforce after the completion of post-school studies. In a report on a comparable group of young people in the Netherlands, du Bois-Reymond (1998) suggests that the expectations and norms of social background weaken as they grow older - they shape their own 'choice biography' in relation to where they want to go in life, and structural factors appear to give way to the individual decisions and choices that are subsequently made. It is possible, in relation to the YRC work, that this same thing could be happening to the survey respondents. It is also possible, however, that there are structural factors working on a level which is not easily identifiable from a purely positivist perspective.

Life-Biographies. In the 1996 survey, respondents were asked - at the end of the questionnaire - to write any comments they felt were relevant to the issues raised by their participation in the survey. As a result, there were 727 comments - ranging in size from single sentences to multi-page essays. The particular use of these comments is that they largely depend on the life-views of the respondent, and are not limited by the specific questions of the questionnaire or the semi-structured framework of the interview-component. Thus, the comments ranged from discussions on religion and politics, to personal problems people had with their families or friends, and on to some wide-ranging philosophies of life.

Specifically, there was discussion by many on the directions their lives have taken - and where they want to go. A lot of this direction seemed to centre on successful transition into adulthood, including:

Getting married and having a family: *"Meeting a partner whom I love has been very important to my life"; "Biggest positive is living with my partner and planning our future together - first marriage then a family"; " a slow increase in emphasis on socialising and looking for a partner"; "Being a parent lessens your desire and ability to study and work as you once did"; "Hope to be financially secure within 5-8 years, be married and have children."*

Having a well paid job and career: *"Doing a professional degree makes career/life experience/satisfaction a lot more certain"; "I'm happily married and in a well paid job I enjoy, what more could you ask for?"; "Young people need to work and further their studies at the same time to ensure a better 'quality' of life"; "I now realise I want/need to further my ed to gain a better job"; "You can be a professional, independent and financially secure and control your own life if you work hard."*

Owning homes/cars: *"I am saving for my first car"; "Living for myself - money, car, more responsibilities - as an adult, that is fun"; "Owning a home these days is so hard to do"; "Getting a driver's licence was particularly useful and an important milestone into adulthood."*

It emerges that, despite the complexity of pathways for young people, there are still basic concerns with attaining 'markers' of adulthood - work, relationships, family. In the same comments, the majority of respondents were clearly concerned with successful attainment of a job in what they see as a very competitive environment.

Problems with the working economy, dissatisfaction with training and education, the lack of working experience, lack of support from government services - these were all discussed as barriers to employment. The exasperation of many of these people - *"How can you get a job when they want experience?!?"* - serves to highlight the importance of having long-term employment. Others emphasised the need to have the right education in order to find the right job - *"Young people need to work and further their studies at the same time to ensure a better 'quality' of life"; "I now realise I want/need to further my ed to gain a better job"; "You need that piece of paper if you want to get a job out there"; "You need some sort of qualification for employment."*

Reasons for these concerns with employment, given by several respondents, centred on gaining independence and control in their lives - *"I have a menial job, but it's full-time - I don't rely on anyone else."* It is apparent, however, that it is still necessary, on the respondent's behalf, to attain these signifiers of adulthood - a job, a family, a home, a car - to be considered an adult - *"When I finish studying and have a real life I'll consider myself an adult."* Work, in addition to the independence and control it gives to people, has about it the same sort of 'status' as owning a car and having a family in relation to adulthood. This set of expectations is largely shared by respondents in both their survey commentary and through the interviews. On this level, then, one can see the 'chains of interdependency' which still exist for this generation of young people: the basic desire to gain the social markers of adulthood which could be seen to maintain the values and norms of past generations, despite the differences in relative ages and social context. Under this broad dimension of structural influence, it becomes necessary then to identify the complex interaction of factors which link these 'chains of interdependency'.

Family and Peer influence. Rudd and Evans (1998) tended to view the family as a base of support and encouragement for students in relation to what they wanted to do after secondary schooling. Friends were also seen to be there as helping in pointing out available options for participants. However, neither family nor peers were identified as major *determinants* of student pathways into further education or the workforce. The interviews of the 1996 study on Participant Pathways and Outcomes had similar findings. Looking at parental and peer group influences, most of the respondents identified their parents as supportive of the decisions they made - assisting them financially and encouraging them, rather than forcing them into specific careers or study. Some interviewees pointed out that, when they were undecided as to where they wanted to go with their lives, their parents provided advice on possible work and education trajectories.

Other comments from the 1996 survey, however, explicitly focused attention on pressure from parents and family to accomplish particular goals - *"It is a social and family expectation that I marry one day"; "There is the expectation that one should get married and have children and that one should start saving for their future to buy a house and a car and save that for a rainy day."* Others make reference to a general pressure to do certain things in life; whether this pressure comes from specific friends and family or from society in general is not made clear - *"Feel pressured to gain financial independence"; "Too much pressure to strive for success"; "Pushed into university system straight after school."* Although not always sure of where

these pressures come from - whether from the family, friends, teachers or the general community - respondents at times have an awareness that there are external expectations which operate on their own life-choices.

Another factor that could be involved is the desire, on the individual's part, to 'keep-up' with their friends and contemporaries. Many respondents seemed to be concerned that their friends had jobs, or better paid jobs than they had. One person felt so ashamed at going nowhere with his job that he had changed his name and denied his identity to past friends he had met on the street. Others were aware of the social pressures on them, but tended to shrug them off. Thus, there seems to be particular emphasis on individual choice and self-determined life biographies reflected in the commentary of some survey respondents - *"I have learned not to take too much notice of what people have to say"; "If society is so mixed up, why not reject it?"; "I see myself at the trunk of a tree of opportunities, with thousands of branches beginning to grow."* Despite the hopes and worries which many of these people share, they still maintain an attitude of agency in terms of their own life experiences and their future. How much they perceive of structural or systemic factors operating in - or on - their own lives is not at all clear at this stage of our study.

Awareness of Structural Limitations

A 10-year longitudinal study of the same group of students who had been in their final years of schooling in 1991 can bring out the changes and adaptations these people have made - and plan on making in the future. Rudd and Evans (1998) argued the need for such an approach to test the validity of the optimism (for work) they found in many of the students in their st ıdy; whether it was a false sense of optimism and/or if these young students had been protected within the walls of their particular colleges.

Rudd and Evans had found that their young survey participants carried with them an optimistic belief that hard work and initiative - in study and in finding employment - would carry them through to successful outcomes. At the same time, there was still an understanding that individuals are dependent on external factors like the employment market and employer preferences - thereby limiting the scope of individuals' aspirations. This section will investigate our own respondents' awareness of structural factors which may have limited, or will limit in the future, their potential employment and/or study options. What does our research evidence reveal on this score?

Gender. Although less visible to our respondents as a structural constraint, gender remains a key factor in determining educational and career pathways.

In the 1997 interviews there were 59 respondents; 29 were female and 29 male. Of the 29 women, 10 (or 34 per cent) of the sample state that the main reason for determining either their study or career pathway was their need to either marry or plan for children. In stark contrast to the men these women's relationships (either about to marry, or have just married, or plan for children) provided the major consideration in determining the choices they were making. This contention can be supported by the interview material.

The theme for these women was consistently around education and career taking second place: *"I am happy to put my career on hold and commit to this priority (marriage) at this stage in my life"; "I have turned down future study options even though my boss wanted me to continue, as I have just married and I feel content"; "Everything is on hold until I marry, what else can I say - I am in love!"; "We plan to have a family as soon as we marry so my job is not a priority"*. In contrast to the above one woman stood out in the sample saying she was now concentrating on her career because, *"my long term relationship is over and I can put all my energy into my work"*.

When interviewing the young men one of the 29 commented that his priorities are *"all important (family, study, job) but I am too young to concentrate on any one thing yet"*. This contrasted significantly against the very 'big' decisions the women were making in their lives (marriage, children, deferring studies, putting their career on hold).

Significantly only 3 of the 29 men mentioned marriage: 2 did so in terms of it being a priority for them, while one mentioned it as more of a long term option when his 'career' has been established. *"I want to be able to have my own home and family and sit back and enjoy everything around me"*. Similarly another young man describes his goals in life as: *"it's all about getting a good job, saving money and buying a house"*.

For the men in general decisions around marriage and children did not appear as significant in terms of everything else in their life going on 'hold'. One man mentioned he was *"juggling his study with his plans to marry"*, juggling but not discontinuing, and another said his girlfriend was important to him but that *"he keeps things in perspective!"*. One young man was saving for a house as his immediate priority but his reasons for this were, *"so I can move out of the family home and be a bit more independent"* - this was quite a different response from those of the women. It seems that marriage and children are simply part of the package for men whereas for over a third of the women interviewed in 1997 marriage and family *is* the package.

Furlong and Cartmel (1997) highlight changes to girls' future employment prospects which they argue are influenced by changing expectations of parents and teachers and reflect the growth of opportunities in the female labour market. However, they also claim these changes, importantly, have not impacted on what is described as traditional class and gender divisions. This analysis contrasts with that of du-Bois Reymond (1998) who argues 'gender, formally one of the main factors to structure the lifecourse, is losing its determining influence' (p. 65). She uses Beck's (1992) terminology to help elaborate on her point. A 'normal biography' is characterised by gender specific expectations, and it is these 'normal biographies' which she says are dissolving. What is being created is a 'choice biography', and du-Bois Reymond suggests that the result of this is a new form of adolescence which is tending towards androdgyny. But she also acknowledges that it is difficult, at times, to separate the two modes - normal or choice - as, 'it is by no means unusual if an adolescent course of life which begins as a gender-specific 'normal biography' merges' (p. 66) into a non-gender specific 'choice biography'. This according to du-Bois Reymond is what contributes to the 'somewhat puzzling picture' presented to us today by young people.

What seems reasonable to conclude from our 1997 interview sample is the very noticeable existence of women who have gender specific 'normal biographies' which includes having fairly clear concepts of starting a family and of their role as a mother. When over a third of our interview sample fits into this 'gender specific' category, it is difficult to conclude that gender is losing its determining influence to the extent that du-Bois Reymond implies. It is perhaps more appropriate to support the contention of Furlong and Cartmel (1997) that the agenda about gender expectations may be changing but the traditional gender divisions basically remain unchallenged.

Background. Where people have come from, who they are and how they see themselves in relation to the constraints that they may perceive in Australian society can be ascertained - once again - from the commentaries of the 1996 survey. Some respondents could see that society is stratified by socio-economic factors, which may limit the potential outcomes of younger people - *"Environment plays a role. Poor people keep getting poorer."* There was the argument that study could help one escape the limits of one's social class - *"I come from a working class background but studied hard and made the most of every opportunity and now I'm going to become a lawyer and I'm nearly a qualified lawyer."* There was also the perception that studies could be limited by one's economic/financial situation - *"Formal training should be made more available at an economic rate for the people who have to start off economically disadvantaged"; "Even though I might not be doing the right course I can't afford to change my mind even though I'm barely out of my teenage years"; "Financially I needed more help at school"; "How is anyone supposed to learn when you can't even get a foot in the door, that's what I want to know."*

In the workplace, gender was seen by some as a very limiting factor in terms of position advancement - *"Less likely to be trusted with responsibilities at work due to the fact that I am a female."* Macro-structural involvement in these factors does not seem to be recognised by respondents. One female argued that, after her own experiences of sexism in work, she *"can't wait until I get a chance to be sexist to those under me."* Another respondent hoped that the sexist and racist behaviour she came across at work was limited to the industry she was employed in - *"Discovered that my workplace is very sexist and racist (hopefully it is just the industry and those in it)."*

Employment Expectations. Coming out of tertiary training or education, many respondents had expectations that their qualifications should lead them into work - an inherent belief in the linear model of education and work. When people do not find a job, they then question the system they are operating within - *"Having completed an honours degree and being unsuccessful in over 30 applications leads one to think, why bother?"; "Something regarding youth unemployment needs to be done URGENTLY. We've been encouraged to stay on at school and now there is nothing to go to."* One respondent looked to their university for preparing them specifically in the employment market - *'Uni's should provide either a booklet or workshops focusing on 'what now' for graduates even if it just serves to bounce ideas off lecturers."*

People, after finishing study, begin to see their chances of getting work as related to what employers want of them - *"I think that expectation from employers has*

increased." . Work experience, something they see as a vital requirement in finding employment, then becomes the next 'goal' for them - *"Although training may help, it is experience which is the most important factor"; "I have all the skills and talents of a person who has had on the job experience but it is very hard to prove it when you are not given the opportunity"; "Work experience - more of it."* Frustration or despair may ensue when people are not given a chance because of what they see as a lack of work experience - *"How are you supposed to get experience? Maybe they* (employers) *should give someone else a break, just like they were given one too. Don't get me wrong, I'm not feeling pity for myself."* Recognising work experience as a prerequisite to employment, some choose to do volunteer work, in the hope of getting a job further down the line. This has its own difficulties for one respondent - *"It's difficult to maintain a positive outlook when the only work you seem to get is volunteer work - you can get by on goodwill and smiles for just so long, but someone's got to pay the rest."*

Government policy on employment comes under the gaze of some. In terms of getting a job, one person rested the blame of Victoria's poor state of employment on 'Bloody Jeff', encouraging people to move to Queensland. Another argued that *"the provision of opportunities rather than limitations needs to be considered by governments at local/regional/national scales."* Others are not happy, when they do get work, with the status of young people, the youth wage not always seen as fair - *"Why should a 19 year old, doing the same work as a 21 year old, be paid less?"* Government policy in the workplace is also questioned, calls for a greater administrative role coming from respondents - *"Better help with sexual harassment, wages and other legal rights for young people in the workforce"; "Watch for exploitation of young trainees by employers - my experience shows a lot of them are used for cheap labour."*

Generation. Respondents are not solely concerned with their present situation. At times they perceive the changes that have taken place in the last twenty years and how, for the young person of today, it is not so easy to find work presently. One person looked at how his father went straight into a job when he left school at an early age, the Forestry Commission giving him lifelong work. This person, in arguing his case that these same employment opportunities for young people don't happen anymore, points out that large-scale, government owned employers like the Forestry Commission have given way to privatisation and downscaling. These views are shared by others - *"People of my generation generally have it harder, due to increased competition"; "Frightening aspect of this generation is job uncertainty - with compulsive competitive tendering"; Opportunities don't exist anymore, so the future looks bleak for myself and my friends."*

A result of their present situation, with job uncertainty and greater competition, is that some people look to their future with less than enthusiasm - *"The future is vague and uninviting"; "I don't want to think in the long-term because it seems to be simply an exercise in futility. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy."*

Conclusion

There is no simple response to the question of what 'choice' means in the lives of the young people in our study. In fact what we have discovered only serves to highlight the complexity which surrounds young people and the influences which impact upon them in making important decisions in their lives. Our hope that a longitudinal study may help clarify some of the issues raised by other more short-term research studies has so far met with only partial success. What the evidence appears to have revealed is that the complexity of young people's experience, their different levels or degrees of awareness of structural factors, and also the need to allow for a longer time-frame for outcomes make it difficult to draw any firm conclusions at this stage. We know that there is nothing unidimensional or linear about young people's pathways or the way they negotiate them; we also now know that they appear on a number of levels to be in denial or are at least somewhat confused about the impact of structural factors on their capacity to make decisions and choose directions/pathways in their lives.

For many of the respondents there is an acute awareness of factors which inhibit them from succeeding, some of which have already been described in this chapter. At the same time, there is also a tendency for the young people to blame themselves - not for the structural factors which frustrate fulfilment, but for not getting it or doing it 'right' for themselves. There are many who express anger about government policy decisions and institutions which promise all and deliver very little, but there remains a temptation to let self-doubt creep in and blur the boundaries between what is reasonable for them to be responsible for, what they can have control over, and what is beyond their control and closed to their choice. To this degree, socio-economic background is not perceived so much as a factor in one's life which directly influences who you are or where you are going, but rather those background factors discussed by respondents (such as gender and class) are regarded as mainly limitations or barriers to what and how much they can achieve.

Rudd and Evans (1998) had surmised that this sense of individual agency (and the optimism associated with it) would be tested as life went beyond the school years. This is validated by our research - these young people find now that their studies do not, alone, get people into employment. The resiliency of the individual shows, however, in the substitution of one goal - getting a qualification - with another - getting work experience. So, whereas on first leaving school study was seen as one way of overcoming background structural limitations and barriers, it is now recognised that work experience - through self-initiative or through education programs incorporating it into their courses - is a vital component of success in finding work. Having qualifications does not necessarily guarantee a person work anymore. Now respondents - especially those who have finished their study - look at work experience as the next requirement in their search for work. VET participants in the 1996 study on pathways also listed work experience as a major aspect of their training - and the fact that it led into work. To get work experience, some respondents advise - or have even undertaken - voluntary work. Others request more work experience in their courses at university or TAFE. Whether these beliefs are found to be true in the long-term, whether the optimistic idea that education and work experience will

overcome the structural barriers that individuals must face, remains to be investigated over the years.

Finally, the evidence we have examined in this chapter highlights the importance of paying attention to the context within which individual choices are made or denied. As Wyn and White (1997) suggest, it is only by means of a contextual perspective on young people's lives that we will be able to begin the process of attempting to disentangle agency from structural constraints. Youth agency is more than the exercise of predetermined choices, because it also depends on the extent to which young people negotiate, contest and challenge institutional practices and processes of social division which affect the outcomes of their individual choices. The 'social process' experienced by young people is a political one and how they negotiate this process will depend on the social, economic and political circumstances which they engage with or bring with them in making the life choices that they do. It is this engagement - how it is negotiated, what degrees of choice are felt to be available and how outcomes are juggled - which will provide us with some sense of the 'degrees' of agency available for these young people. Now that our particular participants have reached their mid-twenties and most have now moved on beyond the world of study, the longer-term aspects of their agency are likely to be put to the test. In this sense our study has now reached its most significant stage.

Appendix A.
The Life-Patterns Typology

A discussion of the five categories in the VOCAM Life-Patterns Typology is provided in the recent article by Looker and Dwyer (1998) *Rethinking Research on the Education Transitions of Youth in the 1990s* , in the Journal of Research in Post-Compulsory Education, volume 3, no. 1. The following extract is taken from that article.

An appropriate typology of student transition for the post-1970 generation would need to cover at least the following five variations or patterns both to *incorporate* and to *extend* the customary frameworks of analysis.

The Vocational Focus.

Despite the increasing complexity of educational transitions, it remains true that a vocational focus is still central to those transitions for many students. Many of them still see further education and training explicitly in terms of opening up a pathway into a future career. Such a 'vocational focus' would include those who follow the linear progression from school and on into the completion of further studies with a definite aim in mind, as well as those who view their further education and training as the necessary step for gaining qualifications that would lead on to a secure position in the workforce. They tend to define their identity in terms of 'becoming' something - a musician, a teacher, social worker or other professional, cabinet-maker, hairdresser or chef. Examples would be those who complete apprenticeships, others who enter vocational courses at the college level, or others who persevere with university studies even of a more generalist kind. The defining aspect is that they give priority to post-compulsory education as a primary part of their transition to adulthood and define their own futures very much in terms of 'career'. Even the research on educational transitions which points to growing uncertainties about vocational integration provides adequate evidence that genuine career pathways persist.

The Occupational Focus.

Further continuity with the past derives from one of the insights expressed in the school-to-work literature - and in its current renewal in school-to-work programs in Western nations: for many young people joining the workforce, and having an occupational focus in life, is central to their definition of adulthood. The growth of youth unemployment and the unpredictability of career outcomes has for some even heightened the important of this occupational focus. In simple terms this option applies

to those young people who on leaving school have made a choice through which they define themselves directly in occupational terms. They see themselves as 'joining the workforce' or 'doing something practical with their lives' and whatever training or development of skills they undertake is seen as additional to or instrumental for their primary intent. Obvious examples would be those who simply leave school to 'get a job', but this group would also include those who see becoming self-employed or working in a family business or farm as the obvious step to take. For them, the work itself is paramount.

The Contextual Focus.

The past concentration on vocational and occupational outcomes perhaps underestimated the significance of transitions being made by other young students who entered upon adult life as a result of choices that could not easily be defined in terms of the customary or standard occupational or vocational categories. This does not exclude the possibility that they themselves actually saw their options as 'occupational' or 'educational', but the choices they made were ones that are not normally categorised in that way; rather they were related to the type of life context (eg, urban or rural living, or a counter-culture) that follows as a result. Our research on transitions needs now to pay greater attention to these types of 'contextual' choices. Young people who move directly into parenting and family life, for example, and who define this as their primary responsibility would be included under this option, as would those students who make life choices that are defined in terms of the context (the theatre, fashion or the environment) rather than the particular type of career or occupation involved. There are those students too who choose contexts that might be categorised as 'alternative' - whether they are options to join some religious community or aid organisation, to follow an alternative or experimental lifestyle, or to 'disengage', travel or subsist by means of the informal economy. What is important in this pattern is the context which is chosen rather than its occupational or educational characteristics as such.

Altered Patterns.

A different type of diversity is introduced by the passage of time. That is, apart from those who experience complexity because there is a range of different commitments in their lives, there are others for whom diversity becomes a factor either because they tend to chop and change from one thing to another or because they are forced to change through particular circumstances affecting their original transitions. For some, this might be a single or straightforward matter of reconsidering their original course of study and setting for themselves some other destination. For others, it might be a complicated process involving a sequence of changes. Thus there are clear examples in some of the longitudinal studies which indicate that a first choice is soon followed by a clear change of direction that is

persevered with. In some cases the first choice was a provisional one, but this is not true of all. The defining characteristic is that there is at work here a two-stage trajectory leading to a change of focus, a new start that is followed through to completion. There are others who proceed through a series of options before perhaps settling for something that they wish to pursue. The emphasis here is on a sequence of choices and changes of direction, which in many cases even includes elements of 'trial and error' or personal negotiation of imposed changes of circumstances or events, but still with a sense of searching for something that can express or fulfil their image of themselves.

Mixed Patterns.

While it is apparent that the prospect of complexity in their transitions within and beyond education is a reality for virtually all young people, those complexities are not always articulated by the students themselves. The degree to which they themselves perceive or grasp the complexity varies. Some see it, affirm it and act on it; others do not. Within the framework we are presenting here, therefore, the category of 'mixed patterns' refers to those students who view their transitions to adult life *explicitly in terms of* a multiplicity of considerations, events and commitments. They are the young people who place more or less equal value or emphasis on a *range* of activities, interests or goals, and who are interested in varying their priorities as they move on in life. Qualitative studies reveal that the categories of work and study for example are not always clear-cut in the minds of young people and that many choose to 'keep their options open' by considering a number of possible destinations simultaneously until they are ready perhaps to commit themselves in a more definite way. Others prefer to have a more complex or varied pattern to their lives rather than being narrowly defined as 'students' or confined to one life path. Variety, choice and a balance of commitments is the way they see their lives unfolding. Some aspects of this complex pattern may be emphasized at one point in their lives; another at another time, but all comprise an important part of their experiences.

It would be wrong to imply that this range of patterns in transitions is unique to the post-1970 generation of students in Western societies. Examples of each of the five have always been part of the total picture of any age-group in transition, although it seems likely that in the past the first two had normative significance. Our reason for explicitly extending the categories of analysis is because of the increasing artificiality of assuming the type of linear sequence restricted to vocational and occupational pathways and outcomes.

Appendix B.
Identifying the VOCAM Typology Groupings

For purposes of following up the life-patterns of the 1,908 respondents to our large questionnaire of Victorian students who left school in the early 1990s, we re-analysed their responses on some specific questions. Our aim was to identify a range of sub-groupings with reference to a life-patterns typology (VOCAM) outlined below and described in Appendix A.

Typology of Youth Pathways

(**V**)ocational Focus	focus on gaining qualifications to enable a career choice to be made
(**O**)ccupational Focus	give priority to work,with other life-choices subordinate to that
(**C**)ontextual Focus	choose a 'life' context (family, community, lifestyle, 'field' of work)
(**A**)ltered Patterns	reconsider their original route and change to another destination
(**M**)ixed Patterns	place equal value or emphasis on a *range* of activities or goals

The identification of sub-groupings was based on a process of elimination regarding responses to specific items in the questionnaire. It proceeded in two separate stages.

Stage 1. Core Groupings

Question 27 of our questionnaire asked the participants about difficulties associated with the combination of study and work commitments, and provided an appropriate starting-point for examining the typology.

Question 27. Attitudes towards Work/Study Combinations

Difficulties	Rural (%)	Urban (%)
work tends to take priority	26	21
need to work, but would prefer full-time study	17	19
prefer to do both	25	29
need both, but difficult to combine	25	25
like both, but trouble finding job	8	8
would prefer work without study	18	18
would prefer study without work	25	31

(Percentages exceed 100% due to multiple responses)

As a first step to identifying sub-groupings, we extracted those (484 respondents) who stated that they *'would prefer to do both'* and categorised them as members of the (M)ixed pattern of the typology. Excluding overlaps and inconsistencies of responses, we then extracted those who *'would prefer to work without having to study'* as members of the (O)ccupational Focus pattern (a resultant 243 out of a 268

total of responses), and those who *'would prefer to study without having to work'* as members of the (V)ocational Focus pattern (a resultant 445 out of a 497 total).

Having established these initial groupings, we then examined the remainder and used another question concerning changes of direction to identify altered patterns. We extracted those who had *'discontinued'* their studies and categorised them as members of the (A)ltered pattern (a resultant 97 from a 264 total).

Excluding all of the above, we turned to a later question concerning possible 'happenings' in their lives, and extracted those who would be *'very happy'* or *'happy'* to have *'no work outside home duties'*. We included these (a resultant 10 from a total of 86 answers) in the (C)ontextual Focus pattern. In other items concerned with attitudes about aspects of adult life, there were 94 respondents who indicated that they considered *'academic/training qualifications'* as *'unimportant'* . Among these, there were 30 who did not belong in the previous 'life-pattern' groupings, and so we decided to include them as members of the (C)ontextual Focus pattern.

This process of elimination to establish the core groupings is indicated in Table A1.

Table A1. Core Typology Items

	Pattern	Persons
prefer to combine study and work	**M**	484
prefer to work without having to study	**O**	243
prefer to study without having to work	**V**	445
discontinued studies	**A**	97
v. happy or happy with no work outside home duties	**C**	10
regard academic/training qualifications as unimportant	**C**	30

This gave us the following core typology grouping of 1,309 from the total of 1,908.

Table A2. Core Typology Respondents

	Persons
(V)ocational Focus	445
(O)ccupational Focus	243
(C)ontextual Focus	40
(A)ltered Patterns	97
(M)ixed Patterns	484
Total	**1,309**
Remainder - unclassified as yet	***599***

Stage 2. Additional Classification

The classification of the remaining 599 also followed a process of elimination. This involved the identification of questionnaire items that were more compatible with one or other element of the typology. The results from this process are displayed in Table A3.

Table A3. Additional Typology Items

	Pattern	Persons
need to combine study & work , butfind it difficult	M	124
I'd like both, but have had trouble finding a job	M	54
changed institutions	A	11
changed courses	A	7
interrupted studies for a period of time	A	20
becoming a parent is very important	C	125
happy or v.happy with casual/irregular work	C	26
academic/training qualifications are very important	V	74
very happy if only had a routine predictable job	O	11
Remainder	**M**	**147**

A re-examination of items across all the the survey indicated that, for purposes of analysis, the responses of the Remainder were more compatible with the (M)ixed pattern grouping. This gave us a final breakdown of the total as displayed in Table A4.

Table A4. Total Typology Respondents

	Persons	%
(V)ocational Focus	519	27
(O)ccupational Focus	254	13
(C)ontextual Focus	191	10
(A)ltered Patterns	135	7
(M)ixed Patterns	809	43
Total	**1,908**	**100**

In 1997 we tested these classifications in a further questionnaire to our participants. Not surprisingly, while the combined total for the vocational and occupational categories remained the same, the proportions were reversed as occupation and career began to receive higher priority amongst those who had now completed their studies. Significantly, however, 44 per cent of the total respondents opted directly for the 'mixed pattern' alternative, thus confirming our provisional estimate.

References

Anisef, P and Axelrod, P (eds) (1993) 'Universities, Graduates and the Marketplace', in **Transitions: School to Work in Canada**, Toronto: Thompson: 103-114

Ball, S (1994) 'Some reflections on policy theory: a brief response to Hatcher and Troyna', in **Journal of Education Policy,** vol 9 no 2: 171-82

Beck, U (1992) **Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity**, London: Sage

Bowe, R, Ball, S and Gold, A (1992) **Reforming Education and Changing Schools: Case Studies in Policy Sociology**, London: Routledge

Chapman, G and Smallwood, J (1992) **Students' Perceptions of TAFE: A study of school students' views of TAFE as a post-school option,** Adelaide: National Centre for Vocational Educational Research.

Côté, J and Allahar, A (1994) **Generation on Hold: Coming of Age in the Late Twentieth Century**, Toronto, Stoddart

Department of Employment Education and Training (DEET) (1993) **NSW Year 10 - 12 Students' Attitudes to Post-compulsory Education and Training**, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service

Department of Employment Education and Training (DEET) (1994) **Young People's Attitudes to Post-compulsory Education and Training,** Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service

du Bois-Reymond, M (1998) '"I Don't Want to Commit Myself Yet": Young People's Life Concepts' in **Journal of Youth Studies,** 1(1): 63-79

Dwyer, P (1996) **Opting Out: Early School Leavers and the Degeneration of Youth Policy,** National Clearing House for Youth Studies, Hobart

Dwyer, P, Harwood, A, Poynter, G and Tyler, D (1997) **Participant Pathways and Outcomes in Vocational Education and Training: 1992-1995,** Youth Research Centre, Melbourne

Dwyer, P (1997) 'Outside the Educational Mainstream: Foreclosed Options in Youth Policy' in **Discourse**, (18) 1: 71-85

Dwyer, P and Wyn, J (1998) 'Post-compulsory Education Policy in Australia and its Impact on Participant Pathways and Outcomes in the 1990s' in ***Journal of Education Policy***

Finn, B (Chairperson, Australian Education Council Review Committee) (1991) **Young People's Participation In Post-Compulsory Education And Training**, Canberra: AGPS

Fulcher G (1989) **Disabling Policies**, London: Falmer Press

Furlong, A and Cartmel, F (1997) **Young People and Social Change: Individualisation and risk in late modernity**, Buckingham: Open University Press

Gregory, R (1995) 'Higher Education Expansion and Economic Change in Australia' in **Australian Bulletin of Labour,** 21(4): 295-322

Heggen, K (1998) 'Youth Research and Young People's View of the Future', paper presented at the **Youth 98: Public Spaces, Public Voices** Symposium, The University of Melbourne, 16-19 April

Holden E (1993) **Services and Early School Leavers**, Working Paper No 10, Youth Research Centre, Melbourne

Holden, E and Dwyer, P (1992) **Making the Break: Leaving School Early**, Working Paper No 8, Youth Research Centre, Melbourne

Holden, E (1992) **Getting A Life: Pathways And Early School Leavers**, Working Paper No 9, Youth Research Centre: Melbourne

Lamb, S (1994) 'Dropping Out of School in Australia: Recent Trends in Participation and Outcomes', in **Youth and Society**, vol 26 no 2: 194-222

Looker, D and Dwyer, P (1998) 'Rethinking Research on the Education Transitions of Youth in the 1990s' in **Journal of Research in Post-Compulsory Education,** 3(1)

Mageean, P (1991) **From Senior Secondary to TAFE: Implications for TAFE of Increased Retention to Year 12,** Adelaide: TAFE National Centre for Research and Development

Redpath, L (1994) 'Education - job mismatch among Canadian university graduates: implications for employers and educators' in **The Canadian Journal of Higher Education** (24) 2: 89-114

Reich, R (1991) **The Work of Nations,** London: Simon and Schuster

Rifkin, J (1995) **The End of Work,** New York: Putnam

Rudd, P and Evans, K (1998) 'Structure and Agency in Youth Transitions: Student Experiences of Vocational Further Education' in **Journal of Youth Studies**, 1(1): 39-62

Sweet, R (1992) 'Can Finn Deliver Vocational Competence?' in **Unicorn**, vol 18 no 1: 31-43

Teichler, U (1989) 'Research on higher education and work in Europe' in **European Journal of Education**, 24(3): 223-248

Trottier, C, Cloutier, R and Laforce, L (1996) 'Vocational Integration of University Graduates: Typology and Multivariate Analysis' in **International Sociology,** 11(1): 91-108

Wyn, J and Holden, E (1994) **Young Women and Girls at Risk,** Research Report No 11, Youth Research Centre: Melbourne

Wyn, J and White, R (1997) **Rethinking Youth,** Sydney, Allen and Unwin

Wyn, J and White, R (1998) 'Young People, Social Problems and Australian Youth Studies' in ***Journal of Youth Studies***, 1(1): 23-38

Youth Research Centre

The Youth Research Centre is located within the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne. It was established in 1988 in response to a recognised need by the youth affairs sector for reliable and up to date research on the issues facing young people today.

The aims of the YRC are to:

- conduct relevant, coherent and reliable research on young people in Australia, with a national and international focus;
- assist with the development of policy and the implementation of initiatives based on research findings;
- develop strong links with the youth affairs sector, with particular attention to helping to identify and address the sector's research needs;
- facilitate communication between educators, researchers, policy makers and youth workers;
- support the research activities of university staff and post-graduate students who have a specific interest in youth affairs; and,
- enhance the professional development of staff and students by assisting them to be informed about the broader context of young people's lives.

Youth Research Centre Activities

The YRC has particular expertise in research on education, transition pathways, social justice, gender equity and employment issues as they affect young people.

The main YRC activities are:

- undertaking research and publishing the outcomes in a manner accessible to policy makers and the youth sector;
- providing information and policy advice to governments and other organisations;
- assisting and encouraging individuals or groups who work with young people.

YRC activities involve:

- undertaking small projects for groups lacking the capacity or opportunity to do so themselves;
- providing a base for post-graduate students wishing to undertake Masters or PhD research on topics related to young people and the youth sector;
- enabling academics to participate in established YRC projects, and/or undertake their own research on youth related issues;
- maintaining a youth sector resource library;
- publishing series of Working Papers and Research Reports;
- conducting public seminars and conferences on a variety of issues relevant to those working in the youth sector.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ISBN 0 7340 1392 2